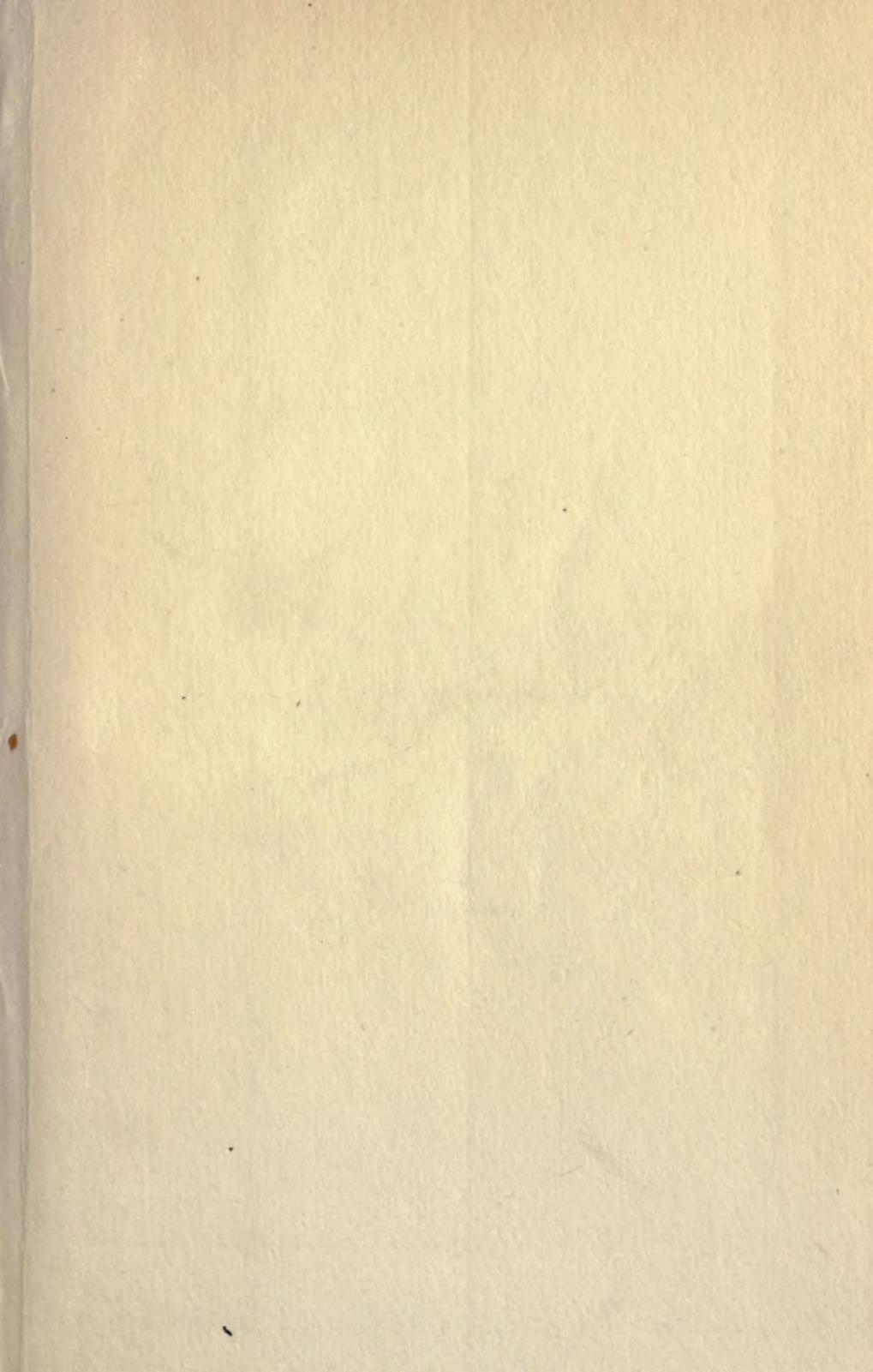




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# HOW BELGIUM SAVED EUROPE

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# HOW BELGIUM SAVED EUROPE

BY CHARLES SAROLEA

PH.D. (LIEGE), LITT.D. (BRUSSELS)  
BELGIAN CONSUL IN EDINBURGH

WITH A PREFACE BY  
COUNT GOBLET D'ALVIELLA  
BELGIAN SECRETARY OF STATE

AND A MAP OF BELGIUM



LONDON  
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

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## PREFACE

D R. SAROLEA has described in a masterly book, "The Anglo-German Problem," the antecedents, or rather the factors, of the present war in which Germany declares that England is her principal enemy. I know of no book that expresses better the mentality of the two nations on the eve of their inevitable conflict, and events have borne out in a striking manner the author's logical deductions.

To-day he deals especially with the part that Belgium has played in this formidable struggle, and the sufferings she has undergone through having remained true to her duty as a neutral nation. I am certain no one can read those tragic pages without becoming more than ever confirmed in his conviction that we are fighting in the cause of right, of liberty, and of civilization. They lay bare to us the true meaning and reveal the true value of the

German “culture” of to-day, and one shudders at the thought of the regime that its promoters would impose on Europe if Germany were to be victorious.

I know of no more disconcerting fact than the facility with which honest and peaceable Germany, gentle, simple, and conscientious, humanitarian and idealist, the Germany of Lessing, Kant, and Goethe, has in one century been transformed into the Germany of William II, of Zeppelin and Krupp, which is exactly its antithesis. Whether the reversion of the Germans to the habits of their barbarous ancestors be a phenomenon of atavism or a contagious aberration sometimes to be met with in the psychology of nations, it must be admitted that to-day they are unanimous in turning their backs on human progress. And worst of all is, German intellectuals are probably acting in all good faith when they uphold the superiority of a culture which authorizes, and even attempts to justify, such atrocities as those of which the Belgians have been the victims.

Dare we hope that Germany, reduced to her proper limits, cured of her megalomania by her disasters, rid of the Prussian Cæsarism which is

at the root of the evil, will return some day to the traditions of a past which even her most bitter opponents recognize to have lacked neither in glory nor advantage to humanity? I should not myself dare to answer this riddle, and I think M. Sarolea himself would hesitate to compromise his reputation as a prophet in attempting to solve it.

Meantime one duty is open to us—that is, to carry on the war to the bitter end against the Germany of the Hohenzollerns and not to stop until any reiteration of these aggressions against peaceful neighbours who only ask that their rights shall be respected has been put beyond the range of possibility. Such is the one condition of any lasting peace.

GOBLET D'ALVIELLA.



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## INTRODUCTION

### I

**I**N the infinitely varied drama of world history, there stand out in golden letters, in bold and luminous outline, a few heroic episodes which not only have exerted a decisive influence on the destiny of man, but which long after any traces of their direct influence have vanished, continue to be a perennial source of moral inspiration to posterity. The Persian Wars of Greece, the Punic Wars of Rome, the Wars of Spain against the Moors, the epic of Joan of Arc, the Invincible Armada, the Rise of the Dutch Republic, the Wars of the French Revolution, are but a few of those outstanding and inspiring chapters in the drama of human heroism.

Once again a fresh chapter has been added before our very eyes to those heroic annals of civilization. The great tragedy of the Belgian War will be placed on the same plane with those soul-stirring events of universal history to which we just referred, and like them it will

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constitute an integral part of the spiritual inheritance of our race. The chequered vicissitudes of Belgian triumphs alternating with Belgian reverses, which are more inspiring than any triumphs, the pathetic story of brave endeavour and of suffering nobly endured in the noblest of causes, the defence of Liége and the fall of Namur, the capture of Brussels and the beleaguering of Antwerp, the destruction of Dinant, Louvain, and Termonde, the bursting of the dykes of the Scheldt, the German Terror and the wholesale exodus of a stricken nation will be through the ages a favourite theme of historians and poets.

In a sudden emergency, Belgium was called upon to arise in defence not only of her own independence, but of the liberties of Europe, of the sanctity of international law. Without hesitation and without counting the cost, Belgium accepted the call. Without warning, and at the very beginning of her military reorganization, Belgium was challenged by the War Lord of Europe. Belgium accepted the challenge, and she, one of the smallest of European nations, resisted the onslaught of the hordes of the German Emperor. The

Belgian people were only known to the world as a prosperous, industrious, resourceful people, trained in all the arts of peace. They had only proved that they were proficient in the science of living. It was left for the war to reveal that they knew equally well how to die.

## II

APART from the military, political and artistic interest of the subjects, there is therefore in the Belgian story a human, an emotional and imaginative appeal which no other chapter of this war is able to call forth in quite the same measure. It touches every responsive chord, it calls forth every deeper feeling of human nature. Sympathy for a small nation unjustly attacked, indignation for an odious international crime, pity for the suffering millions, admiration for a gallant people, gratitude for those who sacrificed themselves and who did not count the cost.

## III

IN the first stages of the War of the Nations the Belgians are the chief actors. It was the invasion of Belgium, it was the violation of

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Belgian neutrality, the breaking of a treaty to which the Germans themselves had been signatories, which was the prime cause of the war. But for this crime Great Britain might not have interfered. Even at the eleventh hour the general conflagration might have been averted. After the crime, Great Britain had no choice but to accept the German challenge.

Again it was the defence of Liége which proved the decisive factor after the beginning of hostilities. It allowed France to complete its mobilization. It destroyed the legend of German invincibility. The enormous importance of the resistance of Liége was still further enhanced by a very natural but very grievous mistake of the French Generalissimo which very nearly proved irreparable and which might prematurely have ended the war in favour of Germany. The French army, hypnotized by Alsace-Lorraine and mainly concerned about the immediate liberation of the Alsatian people, made a forward movement towards Mulhouse which could not be followed up, which could only result in a patriotic demonstration and a spectacular display, and which could not yield any decisive military **advan-**

tage. In consequence, the northern French frontier was nearly denuded of troops, and a mighty tidal wave of two million German soldiers threatened the plains of Belgium and France. But for Belgian heroism, that mighty tide would have carried everything before it. If ever there were an historical event where it was possible to trace the direct connexion between cause and effect, this was pre-eminently such an event. In literal fact, it is Belgium which saved Europe.

## IV

IN one sense the Belgian campaign which is now rapidly drawing to a close, is only an introduction, a captivating prologue to a vast world drama. But it is a prologue which stands by itself. During the first critical days, it is Belgium which is the sole theatre of hostilities, and alas, it is the Belgians who remain the sole occupants ! Although Belgium is fighting the battles of Europe, Europe, mainly owing to the initial French mistake, is not in a position to fight the battles of Belgium. For "strategic reasons" Belgium must be left to her fate. Brussels must be given up

## 6 HOW BELGIUM SAVED EUROPE

to the tender mercies of the Teuton. For "strategic reasons" Belgium must continue to fight in tragic isolation. For two critical weeks the Allies do not appear, and when they do appear it is not in order to co-operate, to come to the rescue, to save Belgium from German occupation. The Allies are left no time to help their sorely-tried neighbour. They have a more urgent task to perform. They have to stem the irresistible tide. They have to fight their own gigantic battles. And, having appeared in Belgium to fight the battle of Mons, they again disappear without joining forces, without sending a single regiment. The Belgians continue under the heel of Germany. German atrocities become more atrocious. Aerschot, Louvain, Dinant, Malines, Termonde are bombarded and destroyed. The aircraft of Count Zeppelin are raining bombs on Antwerp in the darkness of night. A whole nation is panic stricken and takes to the road. Because the German invader chooses to revert to the barbaric stage, the Belgians have to revert to the nomadic stage. Belgium still continues to fight in tragic isolation ! Belgium still continues inch by inch to defend her native soil.

## V

THE Belgian campaign, therefore, may be said to possess a dramatic unity all its own. In yet another sense it possesses an artistic completeness to which no further stage of the war can lay any claim. The Belgian War is probably the last campaign which still recalls to us the old classical methods of warfare. Military operations are concentrated within a small area. Everything stands out in clear outline. We can survey the whole field of operations. In later stages this survey becomes impossible. We can still follow the defence of Liége, the battle of Malines. We cannot follow the battle of Amiens, which has a frontage of two hundred miles, and which is protracted for twelve days, or the battle of the Rivers, which is protracted for six weeks. As we proceed, everything becomes blurred and confused from the very immensity of the operations. War becomes collective and anonymous. The heroic element tends to disappear before the mechanical. The achievement of individuals tends to give way to the movement of millions.

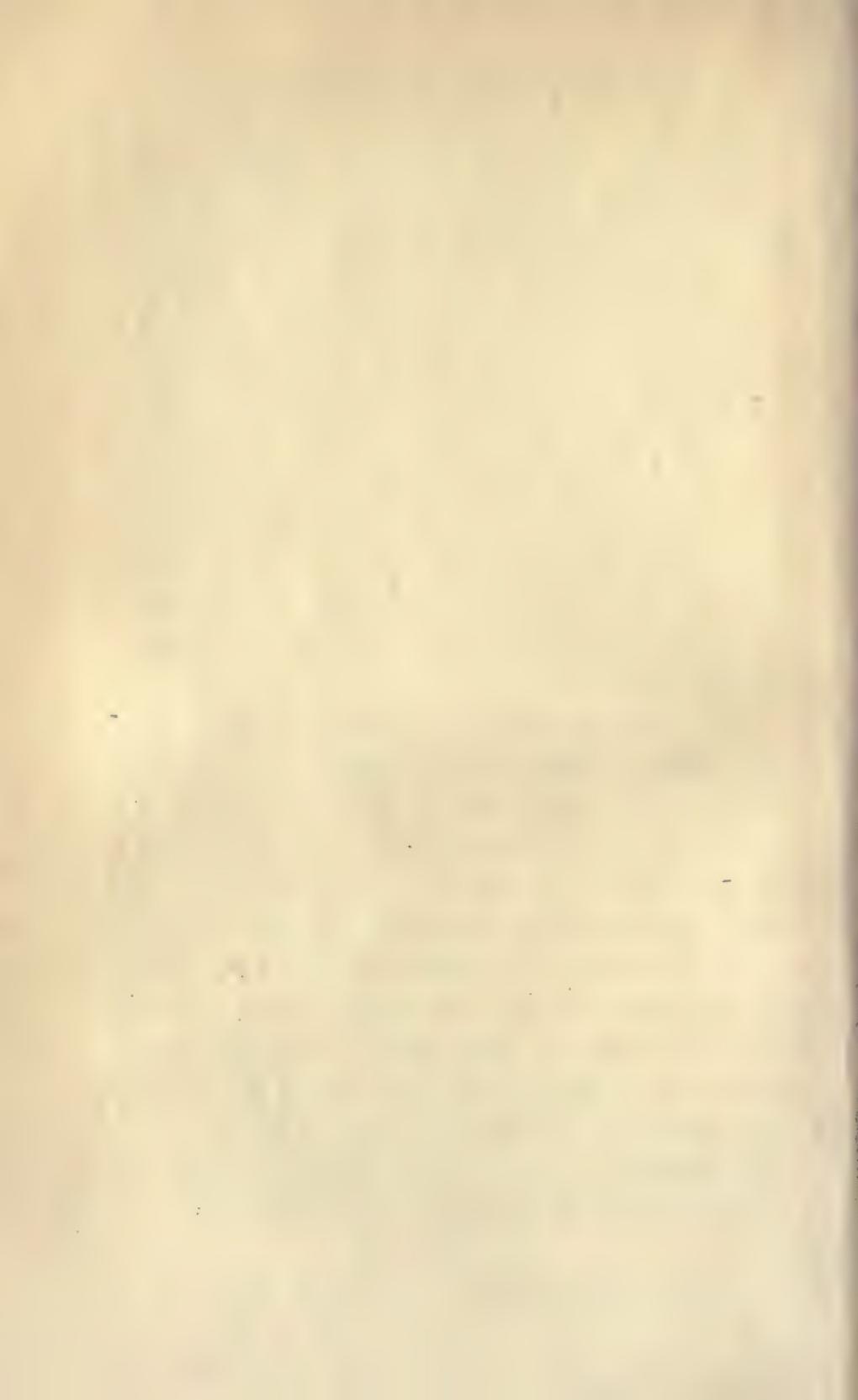
## HOW BELGIUM SAVED EUROPE

### VI

AUTHORS have an egotistical way of urging their own special claims for handling any particular theme. I must follow the precedent of my craft and adduce a similar claim. I trust that in my case the claim may not appear quite unwarranted. A native of Belgium, I passed my childhood in that province of Limburg which has suffered so severely from German atrocities. German troops have been quartered in my father's house, and my mother was a prisoner in their hands. My wife and children managed to escape from their country retreat twenty-four hours before the arrival of the German hordes. A student in the University of Liége, I have spent four years in the noble Walloon city, and every street where Belgian blood was shed recalls some happy memory of early days. For twelve years I have been a Belgian Consul in Scotland, and I have worked for that closer union and alliance between Belgium and Great Britain which is now bearing such splendid fruit, and which will more and more appear as one of the political necessities of the future. I am personally acquainted with most of the

Belgians who have made recent history. His Majesty King Albert has given me repeated proofs of his confidence and only a few weeks ago I had the privilege of listening in private audience to the expression of His Majesty's political views. Since almost the beginning of hostilities I have been present at the scene of events as war correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle*. I am only stating those personal facts because I hope that this familiarity with the country and its inhabitants, with the war and its developments, will impart to my narrative a touch of reality which it could not otherwise possess.

I do not pretend to remain neutral or impassive. I shall do my utmost to refrain from any exaggeration. The story which I am about to tell needs neither exaggeration nor rhetoric. The simplest way of telling the story, the most unadorned, will also be the best. Nor shall I try the patience of the reader with any elaborate discussion or argument. The war will tell its own moral lesson. Any deliberate judgment on the issues involved may be safely left to the conscience of the British public, whose verdict, I am confident, will anticipate the verdict of posterity.



# CHAPTER I

## THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BELGIAN CAMPAIGN

### I

**I**N the supreme alternative which was thrust upon her with such dramatic suddenness, Belgium, we are told, made the right choice. She chose resistance with honour rather than surrender with dishonour. But although Belgium, we are told, did her duty nobly, she only did her duty. She only fulfilled her treaty obligations. I do not think that such a statement accurately defines the position of the Belgian people, nor does it give the true measure of British indebtedness. I do not think that the Belgians merely did their duty. They did infinitely more than their duty. It was not expected of Belgium, it could not be expected of her, that day after day, week after week, she should continue to stand between invading hordes and the allied armies who were preparing for the struggle. It could not be expected of her that she should continue to resist after the surrender

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of her fortresses, after the capture of her capital. It could not be expected of her that she should go on fighting unaided by Great Britain and France, left to the mercy of a ruthless conqueror, with her villages razed to the ground, with her cities bombarded, with her armies bleeding to death, with her women outraged, with her old men and children driven out on the road.

## II

I SUBMIT that Belgium was not in strict honour bound to resist to the bitter end. To save her honour it would have been enough if she had made a firm stand against the invader from the strong position of the Liége fortresses. It would have been enough if she had given the French army a short respite to come to the rescue. As the French army was not ready, the little Belgian army after the surrender of Liége might well have retired under the cover of the walls of Antwerp, the last stronghold and refuge of Belgian independence. As a matter of fact, no Belgian offensive had ever been contemplated. The original plan of campaign devised by the genius of Brialmont,

a plan which was again and again elaborated in classical military treatises, had always been a purely defensive one. Liége and Antwerp had always been the beginning and the end of Belgian strategy. After the defence had broken down, Belgium might have well concluded an honourable armistice with the enemy. She might have tried to save herself from the horrors of a German occupation. She might have pleaded that an unequal fight of a hundred thousand against a million could only lead to needless slaughter. Belgium would still have satisfied the dictates of honour. She would still have fulfilled her treaty obligations.

### III

WE have just stated what Belgium might have done even from the high plane of national honour. Let us now consider what she might have done from the lower plane of enlightened self-interest. From that lower plane Belgium was all the less bound to risk everything in a life-and-death struggle with Germany, as her economic interests, her commercial prosperity would still continue to be bound up after the war, as before the war, with the interests and

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prosperity of the German Empire. Owing to her geographical position, Germany must ever be the commercial Hinterland of Belgium. In recent years Antwerp had become for all practical purposes a German commercial metropolis, and twenty thousand Germans in Antwerp had taken advantage of Belgian hospitality. The Belgian sea-coast had become a health resort of the German middle classes. Considering the vital commercial interests involved, Belgian statesmanship might have urged that, while opposing with the utmost determination the aggression of German militarism, it might still be possible to come to terms with the German people. In any case, Belgium might have tempered valour with prudence, she might have counted the cost, she might have reserved for herself a way of retreat, like Italy or Holland. She need not have staked her all on a doubtful issue. Such a course would certainly have been the safer one. If the Allies did win, they would still have respected a neutrality which it was their interest to respect, and which moreover Belgium would have nobly defended. On the other hand, if the Germans did win they would have

granted more favourable conditions to the Belgians who would have come to honourable terms, who would have refrained from the extremity of heroic despair.

#### IV

WE are often reminded that the acquisition of wealth and power is the controlling factor in determining the policy of any nation. If this were so, Belgium might reasonably have thrown in her lot with Germany. So far as material prosperity is concerned, she had everything to gain and nothing to lose from the victory of Germany. If Belgium, after offering an honourable resistance, had come to honourable terms, and if Germany in consequence of that Belgian surrender had crushed the French armies as she would certainly have done, Belgium would probably after the triumph of Germany have become part of the Greater German Confederation. But she would have remained a self-governing kingdom. She would have retained a large measure of autonomy. She would never have become another Alsace-Lorraine, because Germany would still have had a vital interest in promoting the prosperity of

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Belgium. Antwerp would have risen into the most flourishing port on the Continent, Brussels into the most popular German capital. Belgium would have received an immense accession of wealth and weight instead of remaining a small, insignificant State without influence on the world's affairs. Belgium would have shared more than any other country in the expansion of the German Empire.

### V

BUT Belgium preferred to remain a small independent nation rather than to become a partner in the German Empire. She rejected all the greatness that was offered unto her. She preferred suffering and death, the burning of her homes, the destruction of her cities. The Belgians refused to become German because they would not give up their national personality. If they had become German they would have had to accept German discipline and German culture. And they would have none of German culture and discipline. They preferred to remain loyal to national ideals. And the first national Belgian ideal ever was freedom. For a thousand years the

unruly and turbulent Belgian democracies had fought for that ideal. They had asserted it even against Spanish tyranny. They had retained it even under Austrian rule.

## VI

ONCE more, then, the alternative to the Belgian people in this war was not between honour and dishonour. It was not between duty and enlightened self-interest. The ultimate alternative lay between a commonplace political realism and a lofty political idealism. The Belgians preferred the unpractical course which meant ruin and starvation to the practical, reasonable course which meant ease and comfort and material prosperity. They did not choose to take the lax and broad view of honour : they took the narrowest path, they took the strictest and sternest view. They did not adopt the attitude of frigid reason and of enlightened self-interest. They took the heroic and disinterested attitude. They left entirely out of account all commercial or economic considerations. They did not calculate their chances ; they did not count the cost. They only considered that their native

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soil had been invaded, that they were the victims of a cowardly attack on the part of an insolent aggressor, and they went out to defend that native soil, to meet that attack, to repel that invader, to assert their national independence. They only considered that a great crime was being perpetrated, and they resisted the perpetrators of that crime. They only considered that a great principle was at stake, and that they, even they, were the defenders of that principle, and that to them Destiny had entrusted a sublime duty. They only considered that even though they might be weak, the cause for which they were fighting was invincible, because it was eternal, because against right and justice all the millions of the Kaiser could not ultimately prevail. And having once taken the momentous decision, they threw themselves into the struggle even as their forefathers did in encounters innumerable. Flemings and Walloons, Socialists and Liberals, Clericals and Anti-clericals, they all presented a united front to the invaders. They met the German Terror in the same spirit in which their forefathers had met the Spanish Terror in the days of Alva and the

Inquisition. Inch by inch they defended their territory. When Liége was taken they withdrew to Namur. When the forts of Namur were blown to atoms by the 16 in. howitzer guns, the 12,000 soldiers who had been saved from an army of 26,000 retreated to France, and after three weeks they reappeared at Ostend again to take the field. When Brussels was captured the Belgians fell back on Antwerp. When Termonde was threatened the Belgians burst their dykes and flooded the enemy. When the numbers were too small for the offensive the Belgians were content with the defensive. When a new favourable opportunity arose they resumed the offensive. Time after time, cities were captured and recaptured. Even little villages like Hofstade and Sempst were again and again taken and retaken. Termonde changed hands twice. Malines three times repelled the enemy, and was bombarded five times.

No Britisher has yet learned all the details of the epic struggle, but every British schoolboy knows the result and outcome of the Belgian resistance. Everybody knows that by holding in check the Teutonic hordes the little

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Belgian army has been a decisive factor in the final issue. If Belgium had not been ready to make the great sacrifice, the German armies would certainly have walked over. Paris might be and Calais would certainly be to-day in the hands of the enemy. In all human probability the armies of civilization would have suffered an appalling disaster from the hordes of barbarism. The ultimate issue might still have been the same, but the war would have been more protracted, the carnage infinitely greater, and the final victory more distant.

## VII

I MUST have made it abundantly plain that no mere motives of enlightened national interest or even of worldly honour could account for the desperate struggle which the Belgian people waged against Germany. In order to understand the dogged resistance of the Belgians, we must appeal to the deepest instincts of man, to the elemental impulses of liberty. And perhaps still more must we appeal to the higher motives of outraged justice, to the moral consciousness of right and wrong. Until we take in the fact that from the beginning the

struggle was lifted to a higher plane, we shall fail to understand the true significance of the war. From the beginning the war was to the Belgian people much more than a national war ; it became a Holy War. And the expression "Holy" War must be understood not as a mere literary phrase, but in its literal and exact definition. The Belgian War was a crusade of Civilization against Barbarism, of eternal right against brute force.

So true is this that in order adequately and clearly to realize the Belgian attitude, we are compelled to illustrate our meaning by adducing one of the most mysterious conceptions of our Christian religion, the notion of vicarious suffering. In theological language Belgium suffered *vicariously* for the sake of Europe. She bore the brunt of the struggle. She was left over to the tender mercies of the invaders. She allowed herself to become a battlefield in order that France might be free from becoming a shambles. She had to have her beautiful capital violated in order that the French capital might remain inviolate. She had to submit to vandalism in order that humanity elsewhere might be vindicated. She had to

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lose her soul in order to save the soul of Europe.

## VIII

THE general spirit in which the war was waged, the almost mystical temper which inspired the Belgian people, was strikingly illustrated at the crisis of Liége. Things were looking desperate. It was obvious that unless relief came at once to the besieged, the fortresses could hold out no longer. On the other hand, it was equally obvious that if relief did come Brussels would be saved from the indignity of German occupation. But French and British relief did not come. Yet the Belgians did not complain. They were not only disinterested, they were not only heroic, they were calmly resigned. They were indeed martyrs in the Greek sense of the word. They were witnesses for the European cause.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HERO KING : A CHARACTER SKETCH

**B**EFORE attempting to tell the inspiring tale of Belgian heroism, it is obviously our first task to describe the chief character of the tragedy without whom that tragedy would probably never have been acted, who, in the hour appointed by Destiny, incarnated the national conscience and carried out the national purpose, and to whom his subjects, anticipating the judgment of the future, have already given the name by which he will be known to posterity—"The Hero-King."

#### I

AT the beginning of the war an ordinary observer and student of events might have prophesied that this struggle of the nations

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would inevitably produce a mighty leader of men, whose moral and intellectual stature would be commensurate to the Titanic task assigned to him. And even as an American captain or industry is able to work wonders in proportion to the number of millions confided to his enterprise, even so the Captain-General of the European hosts would find unlimited scope for his genius through the very immensity of the stage and of the resources at his disposal. We know now that such a forecast and such an analogy would have been entirely misleading, and that there is an inverse ratio between the genius of a general and the numbers and resources at his command.

It is precisely the immensity of the stage and the unwieldy size of the European armies which have reduced creative genius to impotence, which have crushed military leadership. In 1814 in the very same theatre of war, between the Aisne and the Marne, Napoleon was able to accomplish miracles and to hold in check the foreign invader with a mere handful of raw levies. In 1914 even Napoleon could have achieved very little. Even he could not have escaped from the grip of a ruthless machine

and his impetuous strategy would have been entirely inapplicable to modern conditions. Quick movements have become impossible. Pitched battles have been replaced by siege battles. This war is pre-eminently an anonymous enterprise, a combination of collective movements from which the personal equation of the commander has been almost entirely eliminated. The personality of genius may still be present, but there is no scope left for its initiative.

## II

AND yet out of the grey autumn mists hiding from our view the Flemish and French battle-fields, one luminous personality has emerged. The unerring instinct of the people all over the world has singled out King Albert of Belgium from amongst a hundred leaders. Never was ruler called upon more unexpectedly to play a more difficult and a more formidable part. When a single hour of hesitation and delay might have involved both Belgium and Europe in one common ruin, he took the fateful decision without wavering. When the Belgian issue largely depended on the whole-hearted support of all

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Belgian parties, the King electrified his subjects with his own spirit and united every party in one national purpose. When the tide of German invasion drove back the Belgian armies from one strategic position to another and gradually wiped out the whole Belgian territory, the King continued to fight in the bogs and marshes of Western Flanders, still undaunted, still defiant, still calm and serene. Even as in times of peace he had effaced himself and had scrupulously played his part as a constitutional sovereign, now in the hour of national agony he claimed for himself responsibility and danger as the unalienable birthright of kingship.

### III

CONSIDERING that the Belgian people are themselves a happy blend of French and Teutonic elements, it was in the fitness of things that the Belgian monarch should mix in his composition the blood of the most brilliant dynasty of France (the Orleans) and of the ablest dynasty of Germany (the Saxe-Coburgs). The members of the Orleans branch descended from Madame de Montespan, have always been noted for their wit and their tact, for their intelligence

and their daring. We find those qualities equally in the Regent immortalized in the pages of Saint Simon, in the "Citizen-King," Louis Philip, and in Leopold II. On the other hand, the Saxe-Coburgs have always been characterized by their prudence and worldly wisdom. We find those qualities in the Prince Consort, in Edward VII, and in the Tsar of Bulgaria. We also find them pre-eminently in King Leopold I of Belgium, the trusted adviser of Queen Victoria. In many ways King Albert of Belgium resembles his Royal grandfather. He seems to have inherited in ample measure the intellectual as well as the moral qualities of the founder of the Belgian dynasty.

#### IV

WHEN on the death of his uncle, King Albert ascended the throne of Belgium, he was still to the general public a somewhat enigmatic figure. The dominant and domineering figure of the old King had filled the stage for forty years and the heir presumptive had remained in the background. He was known to be intelligent and animated with the best intentions. His imposing stature commanded respect. His frank and

open countenance, his cordiality and transparent sincerity inspired confidence. His very shyness and the simplicity of his manner attracted sympathy. He had fully taken advantage of his “Lehrjahre” and “Wanderjahre.” He had travelled far and wide, from the prairies of the Far West to the tropical forests of the Congo. He had received an excellent education under the guidance of General Jungbluth, and under the inspiration of his admirable parents. His affinities for liberal England, his keen interest in social questions, his healthy constitution, his athletic habits, and above all his happy union with the daughter of the famous Bavarian Doctor-Prince, raised the highest expectations. Prince Albert had touched life at many points. He was possessed of an unbounded curiosity. One day the Press would tell of the Prince going down a coal-mine, another day of his driving a railway engine, again another day of his mountaineering exploits in the Tyrol.

## V

ON his coming to the throne many grave difficulties demanded an urgent solution and taxed to the utmost the statesmanship of the young

ruler. Religious and racial quarrels were dividing the nation. Immediately before the war the differences between Flemings and Walloons had gone so far that some political Hotspurs were demanding the administrative separation of the Northern and Southern provinces. The King acted as umpire and peace-maker and indiscriminately gave his confidence to, and called in the advice of both Flemings and Walloons, Liberals and Clericals. The Congo Free State was burdened with a heavy debt and with a dire legacy of internal troubles. King Albert liquidated the legacy and inaugurated a new era of enlightened and humane administration. The army was in process of reconstruction, but the baneful effects of an iniquitous and obsolete system of mercenary conscription still survived. The King threw himself whole-heartedly into the work of Army Reform. Through all those political difficulties he strictly kept within his rights as a constitutional sovereign, and achieved by tact and impartiality, what he could never have obtained by direct pressure.

## VI

BRITISH journalists, like Mr. A. G. Gardiner, have repeatedly emphasized the fact that the advent of King Albert marked a complete breach with the policy and methods of Leopold II. Nothing could be further from the truth, and I am convinced that King Albert would be the first to resent any attempt to minimize the achievements of his predecessor. So far from breaking with the Leopoldian tradition, King Albert continued it. Like King Leopold, he was keenly interested in colonial expansion, and he visited the African Colony from north to south and from east to west. Like King Leopold, he was determined to equip Belgian trade and industry with a mercantile navy, and even before the war he was resolved to shake off the economic dependence on Germany.

## VII

BUT there the analogy between King Leopold and King Albert entirely ends. All well-informed students of Belgian politics admired King Leopold, undoubtedly the clearest and most creative political brain amongst the rulers of his generation,

but few respected him and none loved him. All Belgians equally admire, respect, and love his successor. It was the fatal weakness of King Leopold that he did not understand, and therefore systematically undervalued the moral forces which influence humanity. He had no use for ideas. He had no appreciation for Art and Literature, and it is very significant that although he was always engaged in building schemes, he did not leave one architectural monument behind him.

In every one of those respects King Albert presents a striking contrast to his uncle. He has the keenest appreciation for Art and Literature. He likes to surround himself with Men of Letters, with Scientists and Artists. He has repeatedly honoured Maeterlinck and Verhaeren, who although living in France, have retained their allegiance to their native country. King Albert is an omnivorous reader. An early riser, and of regular and methodical habits, he reserves for his reading the silent hours of the morning, and he has finished his day's studies when the British man of business is just sitting down to his breakfast.

There is another fundamental difference

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between King Albert and his uncle. Behind his courteous, amiable and unassuming exterior he has no doubt the same imperial will, but he has none of King Leopold's despotic temper. To Leopold men were only serviceable tools to be thrown away when they had served their purpose. He would have said like the Kaiser, "I shall crush all who do not obey me." And he certainly acted on that principle. He crushed one big man after another, with the result that in the end he was surrounded only with mediocrities. King Albert has always realized like his ancestor, King Louis XIV. that one of the most important and certainly one of the most difficult parts of kingship is the discriminate selection of competent advisers. He has always realized that advisers are of no value unless their advice be independent and unless it be acted upon. King Albert prefers persuasive methods to the violent methods of Leopold. He prefers to secure by sympathy and diplomacy what he would fail to secure by force.

## VIII

KING ALBERT finds himself to-day the most popular sovereign of Europe. Universal respect

and admiration have gone out spontaneously to a ruler who in a democratic age has upheld the highest ideals of his office, and who in a war characterized by brutality, has maintained the noblest traditions of chivalry. In the tremendous ordeal through which Belgium is passing, it is of untold advantage to the people to be governed by a sovereign who commands the confidence of the whole civilized world. In the future Congress of Liége which will decide the destinies of Europe for generations to come, no influence will make itself more deeply felt, no voice will speak with more authority than the voice of King Albert. He risked his throne in obedience to the call of duty and honour, and the royal sacrifice will not have been made in vain. In the final settlement of accounts the Belgian people will have in their King a most convincing and a most powerful champion. And in the restoration of the ruins accumulated by the German Vandals, the Belgian people may be equally certain that the King will prove himself the master-builder of a nobler and greater nation.



## CHAPTER III

### BELGIUM AND THE BELGIAN PEOPLE BEFORE THE GER- MAN INVASION

#### I

**I**T is characteristic of Belgium that she may best be described in superlatives, and in superlatives which are mutually contradictory. Belgium is in mere size the most diminutive country in Europe. Yet it is also the most thickly populated. It is probably the richest country on the Continent. Yet it is also the country where living is cheapest. It is one of the most free-thinking countries, and it is also one of the most Catholic, almost mediæval in its loyalty to the old religion. In politics it is one of the most advanced, with a formidable organized Socialist party. Yet it is also one of the most Conservative, having been for thirty years under the same Catholic government—a fact which is unique in the history of Parliamentary Government.

## II

THE explanation of those paradoxes is a very simple one. Belgium may no doubt claim to be one nation firmly rooted in the past. If there had been hitherto any doubt as to the intensity of the national feeling, the present war must have removed it. At the same time Belgium is also an artificial creation of politics and diplomacy. There are in Belgium two countries and two races. The North is Flemish, the South is Walloon. The Flemish North is one uniform plain ; the Walloon South-East is mountainous and picturesque. The Flemish districts are mainly agricultural ; the Walloon districts are mainly industrial. The Flemish population is Catholic, as Catholic as the Irish or the French Canadians ; the Walloons are agnostic. The Flemish constituencies are as Conservative as the constituencies of an English or Scottish University. The Walloons are more Socialistic than the miners of Saxony.

## III

THE Teutonic and the Latin races, whose opposition forms the warp and woof of modern

Continental history, have had to live together in Belgium from time immemorial. They have never completely merged their differences. They have never been welded into one homogeneous whole. It is their opposition which, for centuries, has rendered common political action very difficult. It is their opposition which explains why, in the sixteenth century, Belgium failed to assert her independence against Spain, whereas the Dutch provinces succeeded. It is their opposition which explains the whole tragic Belgian history. The wealth of Belgium attracted the foreign invader. Her racial divisions made her an easy prey.

#### IV

IN the past the patriotism of the Belgians, like that of the Italians, had been primarily provincial. Before the Belgian people became one nation they were a federation of separate States. The unconquerable love of freedom which has been their characteristic through the ages refused to submit to the political discipline of one central Government. The centrifugal forces were always stronger than the centripetal. King Albert

is to-day the ruler of one United Kingdom. But his predecessor, Prince Albert of Austria, could sign himself, "By the Grace of God, Archduke of Austria, Duke of Burgundy, of Lothier, of Brabant, of Limburg, of Luxemburg, of Gueldre, Count of Habsbourg, of Flanders, of Artois, of Palatine Burgundy, of Hainaut, of Holland, of Zeeland, of Namur, and of Zutphen, Marquess of the Holy Roman Empire, Lord of Frise, of Saline, of Malines, of the city, town, and land of Utrecht, of Overyssel, and of Groningue."

All through the troubled sixteenth and seventeenth centuries those provinces maintained their distinct political existence. It is true that the province of Brabant exerted a powerful attraction and became eventually the nucleus of a centralized State. Brussels since the fifteenth century was considered as the political capital, and the Constitution of Brabant, the *Joyeuse Entrée*, was the Great Charter and expressed the political ideal of the Belgian people. But notwithstanding this attraction of Brussels and Brabant, each province maintained its individuality.

## V

THIS failure to achieve political unity, this parochialism, this tendency towards federation and Home Rule, which has survived until this day, does not mean that the Belgians have no strong political life. It only means that political life expresses itself, not in the central Government, but in the cities. Belgium has always manifested a highly developed civic activity—as highly developed as in the cities of ancient Greece and mediæval Italy. Few countries can boast of such glorious civic annals. Few countries can show a greater wealth of beautiful historic towns. The British tourist who makes Brussels or Bruges his headquarters can visit in succession, within an hour's railway journey, cities like Ghent, Antwerp, Mechlin, Louvain, Ypres, Liége, Oudenarde, Tournay, each with its own distinct personality, with its own accumulation of treasures of art.

## VI

As Belgium is the meeting-place of the Latin and Teutonic races, and as in Belgium they must needs compete and co-operate, it is interesting

to observe which of the two races has obtained the mastery. The simple answer is that neither has obtained the mastery. Each excels in its own province. Each brings its special gifts to the common stock. The Belgian Walloon is more cheerful, more enthusiastic, more eloquent, more witty, more sociable ; he understands better the art of living. To live in succession in Liége and in Ghent is like living in two different worlds. And it must be admitted that life is infinitely more pleasant on the Meuse, which is mainly a French river, than on the Scheldt, which is mainly a Flemish river. On the other hand, the Fleming is more earnest, more persistent, and also more sensuous and more artistic. Above all, he is more practical, and it is because he is more practical that, on the whole, he has succeeded better than the Walloon. Out of the four great cities of Belgium, three are Flemish : Antwerp, Brussels, and Ghent. If the great Belgian Parliamentary orators are generally French, the great political leaders are generally Flemish. So are the great painters, from Memlinck to Rubens, from Van Dyck to Wiertz. Strangest of all, even the great French writers of Belgium are all of Flemish origin ;

BELGIUM AND BELGIAN PEOPLE 41  
Rodenbach and Verhaeren, de Coster and  
Maeterlinck.

VII

ECONOMICALLY, Belgium is marvellously prosperous. Owing to the natural resources of her soil, to her geographical position and her close proximity to the great markets of Europe, owing, also, to the industry of her inhabitants, Belgium has been, from olden times, one of the world's great trading centres, a very beehive of industry. Curiously enough, the three great economic divisions of Belgium have remained the same through the centuries. In the days of Artevelde, Flanders was the seat of the cloth industry, and has remained so ever since. Brabant, with Brussels and Antwerp, was the seat of international trade, and has remained so ever since. Liége, with Namur and Dinant, was the seat of the metal industry, and still retains its supremacy. Few countries have suffered more from religious persecution, from foreign oppression, from periodic wars. Yet all these adverse circumstances notwithstanding, the lapse of a few years has generally sufficed to restore the material prosperity of the country.

## VIII

IT may be objected that, although the prosperity is great, the standard of living is often low, and that is partly true, whether it be due to the pressure of population, or the Catholic habit of resignation and submission, or to the sweated labour of the numerous convents which tends to reduce wages. But although wages, and especially agricultural wages, are comparatively low, the cost of living is also lower than anywhere, and on the whole there is no such abject poverty in Belgium as there is in Great Britain. The land is largely owned by the people, as Belgium has adopted the Code Napoleon. Co-operation, which is carried as far in Belgium as it is in Denmark, and the nationalization of railways, which in Belgium has proved a magnificent success, are bringing back tens of thousands of industrial workers to the rural districts.

## IX

To estimate Belgian culture with fairness, we must not forget that until 1830 the Belgians never had a chance. Two thousand years ago

Julius Cæsar said of them that they were the bravest of the Gauls. Unfortunately, notwithstanding their bravery, they were no match for the Roman conqueror. Nor were they afterwards a match for their powerful neighbours, who in turn coveted and conquered the rich country. For centuries the Belgians have been under the rule of absentee princes or under the heel of foreign invaders. They fought heroically against Philip II and the Duke of Alva. But here again the might of the Spanish Empire was too much for the free cities of Flanders. After the collapse of the world Empire of Charles Quint, Belgium for two centuries became the cockpit of Europe. The names of Steenkerque, of Ramillies, of Malplaquet, of Neerwinden, of Fontenoy, of Jemappes, of Fleurus, of Ligny, and of Waterloo constitute a catalogue of melancholy eloquence. Yet they only represent part of the suffering which the Belgians endured. What a lurid picture one might unfold of the atrocities perpetrated on our soil, not only by our enemies, but often, alas! by the very soldiers who were to defend Belgium! Pillage, arson, rape, and massacre—in those four words

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are summed up their achievements, and those horrors have lasted for centuries.

Once more, after eighty years of peaceful development, Belgium has become the battle-field of the nations. Once more her plains have been trampled down by the soldiery of Europe. But for the first time in her history she has been the battlefield of Europe *by her own free will*. It is the object of this little book to tell the sad tale of what the little nation has suffered to preserve her own independence and to save the liberties of Europe.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE POSITION OF BELGIUM IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

#### I

ONE of the results of the war will be to compel us completely to revise our idea of the meaning of nationality. How often has it been said in disparagement of Belgium that the Belgian people were not a nation, but an artificial State and a geographical expression ; that there co-existed in Belgium two races which had little in common. In vain was it urged in reply that the same duality applied to Canada, that in Canada also there was a French race and an English race, and that yet no one denied that the Canadian people were one nation. In vain was it pointed out that the same duality applied to Switzerland, that there are French Swiss and German Swiss, and that yet the Swiss people are one nation. It required the War of the Nations to prove that nationality does not depend merely

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on race or language or geography, that nationality is a thing of the soul, that it is a political and moral and spiritual entity. It rests on common traditions, on common habits and common beliefs, on common aspirations and the memory of common sufferings. And it is because nationality is rooted in common aspirations and the memory of common sufferings that nothing will have contributed more permanently to weld together the Flemish and French provinces of Belgium than the heroic struggle for independence which has elicited the sympathy and admiration of the whole world.

### II

To say, then, that Belgium is an artificial creation is merely to say that the existence of Belgium depends on something more essential than geographical limits or economic interests. Belgium is an artificial creation, just as a church or a scientific institution or a code of laws are artificial creations. Belgium is, indeed, the creation of the international law of Europe. It exists not because of any natural boundaries, but because the security of Europe demanded that there should be a political

boundary and a barrier against the supremacy and tyranny of other Powers. Belgium exists because her existence is necessary to the independence of Europe.

*assuring that Germany is the greatest a*

### III

AGE after age the Great Powers of the Continent have coveted the fertile plains and the fair cities of the Netherlands. As every reader of Froissart knows, the history of Flanders in the Middle Ages is nothing but a continued attempt of the Flemish burghers to defend themselves against the encroachments of the French kings. And it is interesting to observe that already in the days of Edward III Great Britain was the guarantor of Flemish independence. France was defeated by the burghers of Bruges and Ghent, and the battle of the "Golden Spurs" is in the history of Belgium what the battle of Bannockburn is in the history of Scotland. In the confusion of the Hundred Years' War the younger branch of the Royal House of France obtained by marriage and deceit what France had failed to obtain by force of arms. The Dukes of Burgundy obtained possession of the Nether-

lands for three generations. After Charles the Bold had ended his mad career on the battle-field of Nancy Spain succeeded to Burgundy. After Spain had failed in her attempt to coerce the Netherlands Austria succeeded to Spain. But as in the Middle Ages, so in modern times it was mainly France which persisted in coveting the rich prize. She failed under Louis XIV. She at first succeeded, but she ultimately failed under Napoleon. France failed because Great Britain could not allow her to succeed. Ever since William III the independence of Belgium and Holland has been the first principle of British foreign policy. Battle after battle has been fought by British arms on Belgian soil to defend Belgian autonomy. It was largely to prevent the annexation of Belgium and Holland that Great Britain waged the wars of the Revolution and Empire. And it was inevitable that the outcome of a Twenty-three Years' War should be the constitution of an independent Belgium and an independent Holland. The foundation of those two little "buffer States" was the one permanent achievement of the Congress of 1815, even as the constitution of the buffer State of Poland will probably be

the most important achievement of the Congress of 1915.

Belgium was united with Holland by the Congress of Vienna. It separated after 1830 with the consent of Europe. From 1831 Belgium was not only independent, but its independence was guaranteed by all the Powers, and as the condition of this guarantee it had to submit to being a neutral State. It was debarred from entering into any treaty of alliance. It was prevented from seeking the protection of any single Power. The international status of Belgium, established by the Treaty of 1839, confirmed by the Treaty of 1870, was placed under the safeguard of all the Powers of Europe, including Germany.

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#### IV

BELGIUM faithfully discharged the obligations imposed upon her by Europe. She maintained an army sufficiently strong to defend her neutrality. She built the formidable line of fortresses of Liège and Namur and Antwerp. In 1870, at the outbreak of the Franco-German War, the Belgian army gathered on the southern frontier to ensure the inviolability of Belgian

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territory. But apart from the critical period of 1870, apart from the futile plot of Napoleon III, the publication of which by Bismarck did more than anything to alienate the sympathies of Great Britain, Belgian neutrality was never seriously threatened or questioned.

### V

As an independent neutral State Belgium entered, after 1831, on a career of unexampled and uninterrupted prosperity. She became the most populous, the most enterprising, the most industrious nation on the continent of Europe. Although small in territory, she became a commercial and industrial Power of the first magnitude. That very prosperity made more than ever the independence of Belgium the keystone of British policy. More than ever did Belgium count as an essential factor in international politics.

And the Belgian problem could not be viewed apart from the Dutch problem. Although separated from Holland as a nation, the future of the Belgian people was bound up with the future of the Dutch. If Belgium fell to Germany, Holland must inevitably

fall, and the possession of Belgium and Holland would mean the possession of two States with a joint population of fifteen millions, with the finest seaboard, with the most important harbours of the Continent, with a magnificent colonial empire in Africa and Asia. The possession of Belgium and Holland would mean the economic and political supremacy of Germany on the whole continent of Europe. It would mean a complete subversion of the balance of power. It would mean a standing menace to the very existence of Great Britain as a State and as an Empire.

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## CHAPTER V

### THE GERMAN PLOT IN BELGIUM

#### I

**I**T is a paradox of political geography that the German Empire, which has mainly expanded at the expense of smaller nationalities—of Schleswig-Holstein, of Poland, of Alsace, and of Hanover—and whose very existence is a menace to smaller nationalities, should be confronted on every side by a fringe of smaller countries—Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Switzerland—all democratic, all autonomous and proud of their autonomy, all with a history and with traditions as ancient and as illustrious as those of the Empire itself. Those countries were all claimed by Pan-Germanists as belonging to the German sphere of influence. They were all weak, and to an Empire believing in brute force weak nations are of no account. They were all rich, and to a nation bent mainly on enriching herself they were a desirable

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prey. They were all in close commercial intercourse with Germany. Therefore it was in the interest of Germany to draw them into closer union with herself. They were all of the same stock, all speaking a Low German dialect. Therefore, in virtue of the doctrine of race, they must all form an integral part of the German Empire.

### II

OF all those countries Belgium was by far the richest. She was also, for political reasons, the most coveted prize. She was the key to England and France. Ever since 1870 Germany had directed her ambitions and aspirations to the annexation of Belgium. She devoted herself to the task with the thoroughness, the "Gründlichkeit," the deliberate method, the unscrupulous cynicism which she has shown in her military organization, taking into her calculations every factor except the moral and spiritual, taking into account every element of success except the sympathy and consent of the people. Her first step was to establish on solid foundations her economic supremacy in Belgium. Her second step was to achieve

the peaceful political penetration and occupation of the country. Her final aim was to annex the country as the spoils of a successful war.

## III

THE first stage, that of commercial dominance, was already far advanced when war broke out. Seldom did any nation accomplish so much in so short a time. Belgium had become an economic protectorate of Germany for all practical purposes. German firms had their branches in every Belgian city. Belgian watering-places like Ostend and Blankenberghe had become colonies of the German upper and middle classes. German shipping and German trade were supreme in Antwerp. The trade was nominally Belgian and appeared as Belgian in commercial statistics, but it was a mere transit trade, and all the profits went to German firms. Antwerp had become the outlet and the outpost of the Westphalian provinces. The glorious city of Rubens was becoming rapidly Germanized. She was losing her Flemish distinction. She was acquiring the stiffness and the vulgarity and the stuccoed luxury of the modern upstart

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German town. She was to be severely punished for opening so wide her gates to the German intruder. It was a strange Nemesis which decreed that the city which had been most hospitable to Germans should be threatened with destruction through German bombs, that the city which had become thoroughly Germanized should eventually become the last stronghold and refuge of Belgian independence.

#### IV

KEEPING pace with the commercial annexation, there took place a peaceful penetration and a gradual annexation of Belgium by Germany. Whole armies of waiters and hairdressers, of clerks and middlemen, of musicians and artists invaded the country. Content with low wages, unassuming at first, they became aggressive with success. For the German has this unpleasant characteristic of the *parvenu*, that his servility whilst building up his fortune is only surpassed by his insolence after he has achieved success. There had arisen in Antwerp a whole colony of German merchant princes. They did not identify themselves either with the national or with the civic life. Not a single enterprise can

be credited to German initiative. In every country German settlers have been easily assimilated. In Belgium they refused to be assimilated. Prospective conquerors do not assimilate themselves to what they consider as an inferior and a subject race.

## V

YET it would be doing those German settlers an injustice to assert that they worked only for their own selfish purposes. They did not work only to enrich themselves. They worked for an ideal, perverted and mischievous no doubt, but still an unselfish ideal.<sup>not</sup> They had been brought up in the belief of the superiority of the German race. They considered themselves as missionaries of German culture. They worked through their teachers and their consuls, through their sporting clubs and their "Turnvereins." They established German tastes, German patterns, German fashions. They used charity and philanthropy to achieve their political ends. When necessary they stooped to organized espionage. A swarm of German spies spread over the country, studying the Belgian defences and preparing for the

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Great Day when the Kaiser's armies would invade Belgian territory.

### VI

THE ardent propaganda of the Pan-Germans hastened on the consummation of the "Great Day." Pan-Germans have been the political sharpshooters of the Empire. Sent off to reconnoitre in advance of the heavy artillery and infantry of politics and of commerce, they were put down, in ordinary times, as hare-brained enthusiasts. In critical times the Foreign Secretary would receive their President and Committee and boast that he was as Pan-German as any of them. Pan-Germans were universally disavowed in official spheres. But disavowal was part of the game. Secrecy and caution were essential. It is quite obvious that if the 20,000 Germans established in Antwerp had openly proclaimed that they were working for German annexation, if the Belgian Government had suspected that the Berlin Intelligence Department was represented by a legion of spies, the Germans would have been summarily ejected from a country whose hospitality they were so shamelessly abusing. They would have

roused the very suspicions which they wanted to allay. They could not have prepared the surprise attack which was the condition of their success. Any reader who studies the evidence now to hand will be driven to the conclusion that the annexation of Belgium was one of the main ends of German world-policy. It is true that so desirable a consummation could only be the culmination and final consecration of a successful Continental policy, a consecration secured without a war if possible, through war if necessary. If the expansion of Germany and Austria had succeeded in the South-East of Europe according to German expectations, Germany and Austria would have first assimilated the Balkan States, Turkey, and Asia Minor. Belgium would have come after. The sudden and dramatic collapse of Austrian plans in the Balkans and the unexpected triumph of Serbia entirely changed the trend of German policy and precipitated events. The Peace of Bucharest had barred the way to German advance in the East. From that moment it became all the more necessary to secure German expansion in the North-West. From that moment an appeal to the arbitrament of war

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became inevitable. The Reichstag voted the new military law. The invasion of Belgium was resolved upon. The doom of Belgium was sealed.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE GERMAN PREPARATIONS FOR THE WAR

#### I

POLITICAL prophecies are a futile game. They are generally irrelevant, and when, perchance, they turn out to be true, nobody listens to them, and people are only wise after the event.

In the beginning of 1792 William Pitt declared that the relations between Britain and France had never been more cordial. Within a few months Great Britain entered upon a war which was to last for twenty-three years. In the beginning of 1870 the Prime Minister of Napoleon III, Emile Ollivier, declared that the peace of Europe had never been more secure. Before three months were over France was dragged into the most disastrous and most humiliating war in her national history.

Even so, at the beginning of 1914 the international horizon was cloudless to the outside

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observer. The relations between Germany and Great Britain were eminently satisfactory. It is true that the conscientious student of contemporary history was perhaps less reassured. As recently as December 1912 I had written a book on the Anglo-German Problem of which the very first sentence stated that "Europe is drifting slowly but steadily towards an awful catastrophe, which, if it does happen, will throw back civilization for the coming generation, as the war of 1870 threw back civilization for the generation which followed and which inherited its dire legacy of evil." I tried in that book to analyse the permanent causes of misunderstanding and friction between the two nations—I tried further to prove that the opposition between the two countries really amounted to a fundamental opposition of principles. I tried to prove that Germany was committed to a militarist policy, which sooner or later must result in a catastrophe. "Alas! the misunderstandings between England and Germany are not superficial, but deep-seated. They do not merely involve questions of commercial interests, but they are rooted in a conflict of principles and ideals. If a war

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between the two countries did break out, it would not be merely an economic war, like the colonial wars between France and England in the eighteenth century; rather would it partake of the nature of a political and religious crusade, like the French wars of the Revolution and the Empire. The present conflict between England and Germany is the old conflict between Liberalism and despotism, between industrialism and militarism, between progress and reaction, between the masses and the classes. The conflict between England and Germany is a conflict, on the one hand, between a nation which believes in political liberty and national autonomy, where the Press is free and where the rulers are responsible to public opinion, and, on the other hand, a nation where public opinion is still muzzled or powerless and where the masses are still under the heel of an absolute Government, a reactionary party, a military Junkerdum, and a despotic bureaucracy.

“The root of the evil lies in the fact that in Germany the war spirit and the war caste still prevail, and that a military Power like Prussia is the predominant partner in the German Con-

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federation. The mischievous masterpiece of Carlyle on Frederick the Great, and his more mischievous letter to the *Times*, have misled English opinion as to the true character and traditions and aims of the Prussian monarchy. Prussia has been pre-eminently for two hundred years the military and reactionary State of Central Europe, much more so even than Russia. Prussia owes whatever she is and whatever territory she has to a systematic policy of cunning and deceit, violence and conquest. No doubt she has achieved an admirable work of organization at home, and has fulfilled what was perhaps a necessary historic mission, but in her international relations she has been mainly a predatory Power. She has stolen her eastern provinces from Poland. She is largely responsible for the murder of a great civilized nation. She has wrested Silesia from Austria. She has taken Hanover from its legitimate rulers. She has taken Schleswig-Holstein from Denmark, Alsace-Lorraine from France. And to-day the military caste in Prussia trust and hope that a final conflict with England will consummate what previous wars have so successfully accomplished in the past. They are

## GERMAN WAR PREPARATIONS 65

all the more anxious to enter the lists and to run the hazards of war because it becomes more and more difficult to govern a divided Reichstag and a dissatisfied people without uniting them against a foreign enemy, and because they realize that unless they restore their prestige and consolidate their power by a signal victory the days of their predominance are numbered.” \*

My book was declared a “mischievous” production. People were determined that because England was peaceful, therefore Germany must be peaceful also. Nobody listened to my prophecies. My book had only a very moderate measure of success. To-day everybody is reading it when it has failed in its object and when it has become little more than a literary curiosity.

Certainly in 1913 and 1914 events did not seem to indicate the impending calamity against which I was warning my readers. Yet with all the attempts at conciliation of Anglo-German friendship societies, with all the pacific missions of Lord Haldane, the calamity has taken place. The storm has burst out over Europe and has dragged the civilized world into a war compared

\* Charles Sarolea, “The Anglo-German Problem.”

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with which even the wars of Napoleon fade into insignificance.

### II

IT has been said that this appalling tragedy has been the result of a mere accident. Had it not been for the shot fired by a fanatic Serbian student there would have been no war. It would almost be as true to say that if in 1870 Prince Napoleon had not fired at Victor Noir there would have been no Franco-German War. Alas! the Bosnian murder was only a pretext. Any other pretext would have done equally well. The war was inevitable. Only one Power could have averted it, and that Power was determined to have it. She did everything to bring war about. Austria could have been held back by Germany even as Russia was kept back by France and England. Neither France nor Great Britain wanted to be dragged in. Serbia, which had only just recovered from a bloody struggle, made every concession to an impossible ultimatum. She submitted to every Austrian demand, even the most humiliating, except to the one demand which was incompatible with her existence as an independent State. In the

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words of Luther, Serbia "could do no other." Austria, egged on by Germany, refused to withdraw her monstrous demands and declared war on the little Balkan State. Russia could not leave Serbia in the lurch. But, even at the eleventh hour, Russia would have welcomed any pressure from without, any offer of mediation. Germany, which all the time had been directing Austrian policy, refused to allow such mediation. Whereas France and Britain stood behind Russia only to moderate her, Germany stood behind Austria to excite her.

### III

THE Serbian tragedy then was only the thinnest pretext. From a hundred convergent proofs it is now abundantly clear that Germany had been preparing for years. The feverish haste of her warlike preparations, the new military law, the constant rattling of the sword, the countless incidents which she was persistently raising, are evidence that Germany meant to strike a blow at the earliest moment, and that she was determined to strike that blow through Belgium. The Belgian invasion had been decided upon years ago. The building

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of German strategic railways on the Belgian frontier would in itself be sufficient proof. Those railways were not justified by any traffic on the southern frontier of the province of Liége. Their only *raison d'être* was a prospective invasion of Belgium. Their only purpose was to throw, at the shortest notice, hundreds of thousands of German troops into Belgium.

Through the Treaty of Bucharest Germany and Austria had sustained a vital blow in the Balkan Peninsula. For twenty-five years they had obeyed the *Drang nach Osten*—the attraction to the East. Now the way to the East was blocked. Austria and Germany had to divert their ambition to the West. Their line of advance had to be shifted from Salonica to Antwerp and Rotterdam.

On the other hand, whereas there was an imperative necessity for an aggressive move, the opportunity for such a move seemed highly favourable. France was in the throes of an internal convulsion. The Caillaux drama had revealed profound divisions in the Government. The revelations of Senator Humbert had revealed lamentable deficiencies in the military organization. Russia was only slowly recovering from the

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war of 1905 and was also shaken by civil strife. But, most important of all, Great Britain was paralysed by the Irish controversy and, even more than France or Russia, was threatened by civil war.

Germany thought her day had come. If she waited any longer to strike, the French Army and the Belgian Army might be reorganized by the New Military Law. Russia might have time to recover, and the Slav powers in the Balkans might strengthen their position against Austria. And finally, the Irish question might be settled. Not a moment was to be lost. War had to be forced upon the Dual Alliance. To use the cynical expression of von Bernhardi, the "*cards had to be shuffled*" to precipitate the war.

### IV

THE cards were shuffled, but they were shuffled so clumsily that before Germany and Austria had sent their first army corps into the field they had lost all their trump cards. Germany may have retained the efficiency of her military machine. In diplomacy she had muddled hopelessly, and the reason is not far to seek. It is the penalty of a State which only believes in

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force that its diplomacy is doomed to impotence. For the essence of diplomacy is the substitution of persuasion for force. Unfortunately, when you believe in brute force you do not think it necessary to resort to persuasion. From the beginning of the negotiations Germany did appeal to force, proved intractable, and whenever she did not have her way she rattled her sword as she had done for forty years.

A few weeks before the war I had the privilege of a memorable interview with M. Paul Cambon, French Ambassador to England which I published in *Everyman*, and in which I examined the reasons of the diplomatic failure of Germany. Little did I anticipate how completely, after a few days, events would bear out M. Paul Cambon's analysis and proclaim to the whole world the tragic isolation of Germany. I repeated in my interview the words of Maximilian Harden, *Uns lebt kein Freund auf der weiten Erde*. In the most decisive crisis of their national history Germany and Austria found themselves without a friend—without a single ally except the unspeakable Turk.

But not only did Germany in her foreign policy fail in securing a single ally, she failed also in

miscalculating all the forces opposed to her. She left out of account the incalculable and imponderable forces of the spirit.

The Germans assumed that Great Britain would not help France. Great Britain did help France.

They assumed that Great Britain would be paralysed by the Irish question. At the first menace of war all British parties forgot their differences.

They assumed that India and South Africa would be disloyal. India and South Africa rallied round the Throne.

They assumed that Great Britain would only send a negligible Expeditionary Force. Before the end of the war Great Britain will have sent two million soldiers.

They assumed that small nationalities like Serbia and Belgium did not count. From those small nationalities Germany and Austria received their most formidable checks.

They assumed that Austria could walk over Serbia. It was Serbia which invaded Austria.

They assumed that Germany would overcome Belgian opposition in twenty-four hours. Belgium resisted the onslaught. After two months her opposition is not overcome.



## CHAPTER VII

# THE GERMAN CHALLENGE AND THE BELGIAN REPLY

### I

**W**HEN the war-cloud gathered over Europe the Belgian Government made haste to take those precautionary measures imposed upon it by circumstances and by treaty obligations. As in 1870, Belgium at once prepared to move her forces to the frontier to bar the way of the invader. The fortifications were put in a state of defence. Fifty thousand civilians were employed at Liège to dig trenches and raise earthworks.

The general mobilization, which was decreed on July 31, took place without a hitch. Whereas it took forty-five days to complete the Russian mobilization, that of the Belgian Army was completed in twenty-four hours. When the Belgian Government decided to mobilize, an incident occurred to which sufficient attention has not been given. The recent Grey Book issued by the Belgian Legation revealed the startling fact

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that the British Minister in Brussels, Sir Francis Villiers, expressed his opinion that Belgian mobilization was premature, and suggested that such action on the part of the Belgian Government might add still further to the international tension. The Belgian War Secretary rightly replied that no Power could possibly take umbrage at the mobilization of a small and neutral country, nor could consider it otherwise than a measure of safety. The British protest and the Belgian decision are equally significant: the one proves the desire of the British Government until the very last to preserve the peace of Europe; the other proves the foresight of the Belgian Government. It was owing to this Belgian foresight that the little nation, which did not expect war, was the first to complete its preparations and the first to meet the enemy.

### II

YET the position of the Belgian Army might well give cause for grievous anxiety. War overtook Belgium at the very beginning of a crisis of military reconstruction. The grave international juncture and the warnings of King

Leopold had determined the Government only recently to reorganize the Army, to strengthen national defences, to introduce compulsory service. Party spirit had obstructed and delayed this far-reaching scheme of military reform. The new law, therefore, had only been passed for twelve months, and although the Army itself was ready, although new contingents had already been added, there had been no time left to supply the new forces with adequate equipment, nor to supplement the artillery armament which was to play so important a part in the Belgian campaign.

### III

THE Belgian Government had completed their mobilization with all the more determination because they hoped that a firm policy might prove the best safeguard against an invasion. They were still confident that the Belgian mobilization would be merely a measure of safety. Until the last moment that confidence survived. Belgian sympathies were of course with France, but the last thing which the Belgian people wanted was war. As lately as August 2 there was an optimistic article in

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*Le Matin*, the leading paper of Antwerp, expressing the conviction that Belgium would not be involved in the conflagration. Why, indeed, should Belgium be dragged in? Why should any Power force war upon a small neighbouring State? Even Bismarck, the man of blood and iron, had respected in 1870 the neutrality of Belgium. Why should William II violate the sanctity of treaties?

### IV

AND, indeed, there were many reasons why the Germans should have respected the neutrality of Belgium.

First of all, there was the consideration of the public opinion of the civilized world. Germany might not have much regard for treaty rights and, considering the treaty as a mere "scrap of paper," might be inclined to tear it to pieces. But the judgment of the civilized world would be unanimous in condemning such a crime, and that judgment represented one of those moral forces which Germany so entirely miscalculated. That condemnation sooner or later would weigh in the balance.

In the second place, Germany ought to have

been restrained by a wholesome fear of consequences and by a knowledge of the international situation, and especially by a knowledge of the main principles guiding British policy. No doubt Great Britain, as advised by Admiral Mahan, might in any case have joined Russia and France, even if Belgium had not been attacked. But, even if Great Britain had joined, she would have done so only half-heartedly and only at the last extremity. There would have been indecision and delay. The *Daily News* until the eleventh hour declared in favour of British neutrality. Even on July 31, as we saw, the British Minister was against a premature Belgian mobilization.

It was the invasion of Belgium and the violation of treaty rights which put an end to British indecision, which converted all waverers.

And, last but not least, half a century of friendly intercourse with Belgium and her own commercial interests ought to have prevented Germany from taking the fatal step. Belgium was almost a German colony. Commercial relations were drawing the countries every day closer together. If peaceful relations were maintained, it was almost inevitable that Belgium

should become an economic dependency. Why jeopardize the future? Why make an irreconcilable enemy of a friendly and prosperous little country which sooner or later would be drawn into the sphere of influence of the German Empire?

## V

ALL these political and moral reasons were outweighed by one overwhelming military reason. Germany declared war because she thought, and thought rightly, that she could thereby reap some decisive military advantage. And from the German point of view the argument was unanswerable. No doubt the invasion of Belgium was a crime, but to plunge the whole of Europe into war on the flimsy Serbian pretext was itself a crime. And once war was declared, the invasion of Belgium became a prime strategic necessity. In 1870 there was no need to invade Belgium, because war had only to be waged on one front. In 1914, on the contrary, Germany had to wage war on two, and eventually on three, fronts. Under those conditions she was absolutely committed to the Napoleonic strategy of quick movements and

decisive blows. Like Napoleon, Germany would be confronted by a European coalition. And, like Napoleon, she could only meet it by inflicting a crushing defeat severally and successively on each one of her enemies. That strategy was quite possible and might have proved successful, as Germany had an advance of over six weeks over Russia.

The French General Staff seems to have assumed that Germany had two alternative plans. In fact there was only one plan, and, strangely enough, it was this one plan for which France seems to have been least prepared. The plan, as we stated before, was simple and obvious. It would take Russia forty-five days to complete her mobilization. It was hoped by the German Staff that it would take Germany only three weeks to finish the French campaign by one or two decisive defeats. In 1870 the whole campaign had been decided in less than one month. Why not in 1914, when the German Army was so much better prepared, better equipped, and so much more formidable in numbers ?

## VI

THE way through Belgium was the line of least resistance. In fact, Germany expected it to be a line of no resistance. It was one of their many miscalculations. It was the most fatal of all, for it was the one miscalculation which practically decided the course of the European campaign.

*On Sunday night, August 2—I beg the reader to note the exact time, because all through the war Germany has utilized the darkness of night to achieve her sinister purposes and to secure some advantage over her opponents—on Sunday night the German Ambassador sent the following ultimatum:*

“The German Government has received absolutely trustworthy information according to which French forces would intend\* to march on the Meuse through Givet and Namur.

\* The French text has the hypothetical conditional : *auraient l'intention*. Not only was it not a fact, but a mere intention. Even the intention is admitted to be only a hypothesis. The text does not say “*ont l'intention*,” but “*auraient l'intention*.” Germany violates Belgian territory because it is reported that the French would have or might have the intention of moving across the Belgian frontier.

“ That information leaves no doubt as to the intention of France to advance against Germany through Belgian territory.

“ The German Imperial Government cannot help dreading lest Belgium, notwithstanding her best intentions, may not be in a position to repel unaided a French advance of such importance.

“ In this fact we find sufficient certainty of a menace directed against Germany. It is imperative for the sake of self-preservation that Germany should anticipate this attack of the enemy.

“ The German Government would keenly regret that Belgium should consider as an act of hostility against her the fact that the measures of the enemies of Germany oblige her to violate Belgian territory. In order to prevent any misunderstanding the German Government makes the following declaration :

“ (1) Germany has not in view any act of hostility against Belgium.

“ If Belgium agrees to assume in the war which is about to begin an attitude of benevolent neutrality towards Germany, the German Government on its side pledges itself to guarantee

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the integrity of the Belgian Kingdom and its possessions in all their extent.

“(2) Germany pledges herself on the above-named condition to evacuate Belgian territory as soon as peace is concluded.

“(3) If Belgium preserves her friendly attitude, Germany is ready, in agreement with the authorities of the Belgian Government, to buy in ready cash whatever will be required for her troops and to indemnify Belgium for any damage inflicted.

“(4) If Belgium takes up a hostile attitude to the German Army, and especially if she opposes any obstacles to their advance, either through their fortifications of the Meuse, or by the destruction of roads, railways, or tunnels, Germany will be compelled to consider Belgium as an enemy.

“In that case Germany will take no engagement as regards the Belgian Kingdom, but she will leave the settlement of the mutual relations of the two States to the arbitrament of arms. The German Government has the just hope that this possibility will not take place and that the Belgian Government will take such measures as will prevent such a contingency happening. In

such case the friendly relations which united the two neighbouring nations will become closer and lasting."

## VII

It would be futile to discuss the terms of this odious document, which tries to justify the violation of Belgian neutrality, and in which the mere report of a possible intention on the part of the French Government is given as a sufficient pretext. It would be even more futile to discuss the German point of view. The German Government have themselves given their whole case away. The German Chancellor, von Bethmann-Hollweg, the immortal author of the "scrap of paper" phrase, declared in the Reichstag that the invasion of Belgium was a grievous wrong, but that the wrong was justified by the plea of necessity.

Serbia had been given forty-eight hours by Austria to reply to her ultimatum. Belgium was only given twelve hours by Germany, between seven in the evening and seven in the morning. Belgium was thus allowed one single night to take the most momentous decision in her national history. But truly those twelve noc-

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turnal hours were not needed for the Belgian people to make up their minds. If the challenge was sudden, the reply was immediate. A thrill of indignation passed through the country. Not one citizen was taken in by this combination of hypocrisy and violence. Everyone saw through the clumsy mendacity which imputed to the French Government the very crime which the Germans were prepared to commit. The Belgian Government, on Monday morning, August 3, sent the following dignified reply :

“From its Note of August 2, 1914, the German Government has issued a declaration that, according to trustworthy information, French forces should have the intention of advancing on the Meuse through Givet and Namur, and that, as Belgium, notwithstanding her best intentions, would not be in a position to repel unaided an advance of the French troops, the German Government would consider it its duty to anticipate this attack and to violate Belgian territory. Under those conditions Germany asks the Belgian Government to take up a friendly attitude, and pledges herself on the conclusion of peace to guarantee the integrity of the Kingdom and its possessions in

all their extent. The German Note adds that, if Belgium opposes obstacles to the advance of the German troops, Germany will be compelled to treat Belgium as an enemy, and to leave the ultimate solution of the mutual relations of the two States to the arbitrament of arms.

"This Note has called forth the profound and painful surprise of His Majesty's Government. The intentions which Germany attributes to France are in contradiction with the emphatic declarations which have been given to us on August 1 in the name of the Government of the French Republic. Besides, if, contrary to our expectation, the violation of Belgian neutrality were to be committed by France, Belgium would fulfil all her international duties, and her Army would offer the invader the most vigorous resistance. The Treaties of 1839, confirmed by the Treaties of 1870, consecrate the independence and the neutrality of Belgian under the guarantee of the Powers, and notably of His Majesty the King of Prussia.

"Belgium has always been loyal to her international obligations. She has accomplished her duties in a spirit of strict impartiality. She

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has never neglected to maintain and ensure her neutrality.

“The attack against her independence with which the German Government threatens Belgium would constitute a flagrant violation of the Law of Nations.

“No strategic interest can justify the violation of right.

“The Belgian Government, if it accepted the proposals which have been notified to it, would sacrifice the honour of the nation and, at the same time, would betray its duties towards Europe.

“Conscious of the part which Belgium has played for eighty years in the civilization of the world, the Government refuses to believe that the independence of Belgium can only be maintained at the expense of the violation of her neutrality.

“If its expectations prove to be unfounded the Belgian Government is firmly decided to repel by all means in its power any attack against its rights.”

## VIII

IN accordance with the Belgian Constitution, the Belgian Government has had to come to a critical decision without consulting the nation. But the Belgian Parliament ratified with perfect unanimity the action of the Government. On Tuesday, August 4, the King and Royal family appeared before the House, and His Majesty read the following historic declaration :

“ Never since 1830 did Belgium live through such an anxious hour. The integrity of our territory is threatened. The compelling force of our rights, the sympathy of which Belgium, proud of her free institutions and of her achievements, has always enjoyed, the necessity of our independent existence for the balance of European power, still leave us hope that the contingency which we dread may not happen ; but if our hope is unfounded, if we have to resist the invasion of our native soil and defend our threatened homes, that duty, however hard it may be, will find us armed and resolute and prepared for any sacrifice. Already, in anticipation of any contingency, our gallant youth have risen, firmly resolved, with the

tenacity and the sang-froid of the Belgians, to defend their country in danger.

“I send to that youth, in the name of the nation, a brotherly greeting. Everywhere, in Flanders and Walloon provinces, in town and country, one feeling fills all minds : the enemies of our independence. One duty forces itself upon us with tenacious resistance.

“In the grave circumstances of the present hour two virtues are indispensable : the calm of firm courage and a close union of all Belgians.

“Both virtues have already been revealed to the eyes of an enthusiastic nation.

“The perfect mobilization of our Army, the large number of voluntary enlistments, the devotion of the civilian population, the self-abnegation of families, have shown in no doubtful way the comforting bravery which animates the Belgian people. The moment has come to act.

“I have summoned you, gentlemen, to enable the Legislature to associate itself with public enthusiasm in the same spirit of sacrifice. You will take, gentlemen, all the urgent measures imposed by circumstances, either in view of the war or to maintain public order. When I see

this Assembly, in which there is only one party left, that of patriotism, our memories go back to the Congress of 1830, and I ask you, gentlemen, ‘Are you decided to maintain intact the sacred inheritance of our ancestors?’

“Nobody, in this country, will betray his duty. The Army, strong and disciplined, is called to its task. My Government and myself have absolute trust in its leaders and its soldiers. Supported by the people, the Government is conscious of its responsibility, and convinced that the efforts of all citizens, united in the most fervent patriotism, will safeguard the supreme interests of the nation.

“If the foreigner, in violation of the neutrality of which you have always scrupulously observed the obligations, violates our territory, he will find all the Belgians grouped round their Sovereign, who will never betray his constitutional rights, and round the Government, invested with the absolute confidence of the whole nation.

“I have faith in our destinies. A nation which defends itself commands the respect of all. Such a nation cannot perish.

“God will be with us in a just cause.

“Long live independent Belgium !”

## IX

THE speech of King Albert was received with acclamation. Party feeling generally runs high in Belgium and there are profound divisions, religious and political, racial and linguistic. The Socialists are Republican on principle and are opposed to the Monarchy, but in this hour of national peril the whole nation rallied round its rulers. All party differences were forgotten. There were no more Flemings or Walloons, Liberals or Clericals, Monarchists or Socialists. To face the Teuton [there only remained one united Belgian people.

Immediately after the departure of the King the Belgian Prime Minister had to announce to the Houses of Parliament that Germany had actually declared war. With the duplicity and perfidy which characterized Germany all through the preparatory stages, she had waited before declaring war until her mobilization was complete on the Belgian frontier. Only a few hours after the declaration of war the German armies had advanced to the very outposts of Liége. The people of Liége were ready to receive them.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE DEFENCE OF LIÉGE

#### I

**W**E have briefly stated the German plan of campaign: its whole object was to throw twenty army corps into Northern France through Belgium, to strike quickly and to strike hard, to deal a crushing blow, to finish the French war in a month, and then to turn against Russia, which in the meantime would have been kept in check by Austria.

For the realization of that plan of campaign time was the one all-important element. And it was exactly the one element which the Belgian Army was able to control. For the Belgian plan of campaign originally was wholly dilatory and defensive. The Belgian Army seemed too small to take the offensive. On the other hand, Belgium happened to possess one of the strongest lines of defence in Europe. She could, therefore, hold back the German advance. She could give France time to come to the rescue. Once the French Army had reached

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the theatre of war, Belgium would have done her allotted part. Her army would have safely withdrawn behind the entrenched camp of Antwerp and, keeping in the rear of the invader, might still have kept ready for any further emergency.

The Belgian plan of campaign was extraordinarily simple, but it implied two assumptions. The Belgians were to limit themselves to a vigorous defensive; the French were to follow up with a vigorous offensive. Both assumptions were falsified. Belgium did not limit herself to the defensive. Belgium diverted against herself the whole weight of the German attack. On the other hand, France did not at once take up a vigorous offensive. France made her imprudent and premature effort in the direction of Alsace-Lorraine. There may have been, as we suggested, sentimental and political reasons which prevented the advance on the Meuse. At the same time, it remains to this day an unexplained mystery why the French Army entirely failed to co-operate with the defence of Liége and Namur.

## II

ON August 3 the German troops entered Belgium by three different routes. The Belgians were prepared to meet the aggressor. For Belgian mobilization had begun before that of any other allied Power, and, as the country possesses a unique network of roads and railways, it was practically completed on the arrival of the enemy.

From the outset the Germans revealed their secret plan of campaign by their very method of approach. In the first place, they threw against Visé a vanguard of 1500 picked soldiers in one hundred and fifty motor-cars. In the second place, they did not trouble about their commissariat. They did not wait to bring up supplies. They expected to live on the country, with the result that their troops suffered from starvation, and that German straggling parties could be caught by the Walloon peasants with the offer of a loaf of bread. But, most important of all, they did not wait for their heavy siege guns to come up. Rather than delay action for several days, they were prepared to

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sacrifice thousands of lives in order to gain a brief advance in time.

Almost on entering Belgium the Germans began their attempt to reduce the population to submission by establishing a reign of terror. The civilian population unfortunately gave the invader an opportune pretext. The district contains a large population of gun-makers familiar with the use of fire-weapons and unfamiliar with the ways of warfare, and it seems proven that several citizens of Visé did take part in the hostilities and that they fired at the enemy. The Germans retaliated with ruthless severity, and the pretty little town of Visé may claim the melancholy distinction of having been the first Belgian city to be destroyed by the Teuton.

### III

LIÉGE is the industrial capital of Belgium, as Antwerp is the commercial capital, and Brussels the political capital. Its coal-mines, its extensive ironworks, the Cockerill Works of Seraing, which are only second to Krupp's, the famous glassworks of the Val Saint Lambert, all combine to make the Liége district one of the most

flourishing centres of industry in Europe. But, quite apart from its economic importance, Liége is one of the most interesting historical cities in Belgium. It has probably more character and originality than any other. It cannot boast of the architectural marvels of Bruges and Ghent, but it has retained the undaunted spirit which in the Middle Ages produced those architectural marvels. It has a more homogeneous population than any other Belgian town. It has always been the centre of the Walloons, of whom it has been said that they are more French than the French. Situated between the Flemings on the west and the Germans on the east, the Liége people have a vivacity and a brightness which are more characteristic of the southern Frenchman than of the northern.

But, above all, Liége stands alone in Belgian history as having always been the seat of an independent State, with the exception of the brief interval of the French occupation during the Revolutionary Wars.

The Episcopal principality of Liége had never known the yoke of the foreigner. It was pleasant to live under the rule of the Prince-Bishops of Liége. Nowhere else were

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popular franchises better guaranteed. From the fifteenth century until the end of the eighteenth Belgian and foreign publicists continually pointed out the fact with remarkable unanimity. They all agreed in proclaiming that the Liégeois are the freest people in Europe. In contrast to the kings who claimed in the name of the Almighty the right of disposing arbitrarily of the lives and the property of their subjects, the Prince-Bishops of Liége considered themselves constitutional rulers, having no other rights than those which are conferred upon them by law. This is what one of them, Gerard de Groesbeek, has well said in the following terse formula : "A Prince-Bishop of Liége only gives a verdict through his judges. He does not issue decrees which are against the laws of the State, unless it be with the consent of the people themselves."

The Government of the Liége principality was the most paternal, the most patriarchal in the Low Countries, and its annals provide us with a thousand delightful episodes which go to prove that benevolent rule. In what other country could one have seen a sovereign engaged in a lawsuit before his

own tribunals and condemned to pay expenses, as the Prince-Bishop Adolphe de la Marck was condemned by the Liége tribunals in 1340? In 1546 the Prince-Bishop asked the town of Liége, as any private citizen might have asked, permission to connect his palace with the water-supply of the town. The two burgomasters made inquiries to find out whether it was possible to comply with his request, and, the inquiry made, it was decided that the request of the Sovereign should be granted, on condition, however, that, in case of a drought, the Liégeois might withdraw the concession. About the time of the French Revolution the palace of the Prince-Bishop was hidden by a few mean houses, which he would have liked to demolish. "But," says a contemporary, "the rights of property are sacred in Liége, and the houses remained standing." It is only in recent times that they have been demolished.

## IV

THE city of Liége is picturesquely situated on the left bank of the Meuse, and its position in the valley at the confluence of three rivers and in close proximity to the neutral State of Holland

makes it one of the strongest natural positions in Europe. The position has been further strengthened by a system of fortifications built by General Brialmont. The Liége fortifications were the latest creation of the greatest military engineer of his day. They were only built after many years of opposition, and their history is one of the most curious episodes of recent Belgian history. Dismissed from active service, again and again in violent conflict with the Liberal leader, M. Frêre-Orban, General Brialmont finally built Liége on the model of his own fortifications of Bucharest.

But he would never have achieved his end if it had not been for the strenuous support of King Leopold II.

"That our soldiers have not undergone their fate like sheep," says Professor Hamelius, of the University of Liége, in his interesting account of the siege, "is due, in the first place, to the foresight and courage of that unpopular monarch, King Leopold II. Let every Belgian and Englishman who has blamed his colonial methods of government (it would be a mistake to think that we Belgians were afraid of blaming him) do justice to the man's memory at the

present hour. He clearly saw the impending cloud and made preparations for it. If we may repeat his own homely joke when taunting a member of our Parliament for opposing his contemplated fortifications of the Meuse : ‘Never go without an umbrella, sir !’

“He initiated the two measures which have saved our nation from the shame of neglecting their duty as keepers of the peace and as warders of one of the highways of Europe. One was the building of the forts, the other was the reform and increase of our Army.

“As the fortress of Antwerp was built in the teeth of a violent opposition, so the forts of Liége were given to a reluctant country amid protests and complaints. The King had found in Brialmont the leading military engineer of the period, and he commissioned him to recast the whole system of defence. Up to about 1880 it was a dogma of Belgian policy that in case of a foreign invasion our Government was to retire to Antwerp and hold that place until England and other Powers who had guaranteed our independence should come to our assistance. This settled idea had to be given up in favour of a new system, which consisted in strengthening

the valley of the Meuse so as to prevent an army from crossing it either on its way from Germany to France or from France to Germany. The latter hypothesis has probably not been seriously contemplated, as the advantage of numbers was more and more on the German side.

"When the planning and building of the forts, under the supervision of Brialmont himself, were finally carried, it was found that our Army was deficient in numbers and in quality. The latter defect was owing to an obsolete system of recruiting, which allowed any man called to barracks by the ballot, or drawing of lots (*tirage au sort*, as we still call it), to find a poorer man as a substitute, pay him a small sum of money (the sum never rose to £80), and allow him to serve the country in his place.

"King Leopold decided that this antiquated system had to go, and that Belgian gentlemen and farmers must serve their country in their own person, as Germans and Frenchmen had long been doing. He was not afraid of making public speeches on the subject, and, notwithstanding the reluctance of his Parliamentary majority, he finally carried his point. The law doing away with substitutes in the Army was

one of the last signed by him before his death. It must be pointed out that the Army that did so well in August last was recruited partly under the old system and partly under the new, only the younger men having come in after the Bill was put in force."

## V

"THE works round Liége," Mr. Belloc writes, "consist of twelve isolated forts, forming the most perfect and most formidable ring of defences in Europe or in the world. The ideal ring fortress would be a town capable of ample provisioning and lying within an exact circle of heights, at an average of some 8000 yards distance, each with a self-contained closed work, and each such work within support of at least two others. No such absolutely exact conditions exist, of course, in reality, but skill and the relief of the soil combined have endowed Liége with a ring of forts very nearly combining these conditions. The circle, though not exact, is more nearly exact than in the case of any other ring-fortress. Its largest diameter is not 20 per cent. in excess of its shortest. The greatest distance between any two works is but 7000

yards, the average less than 4000. Each work is easily supported by two others, and often by three, and in one case by four."

The weakness of the Liége fortifications was, in the first place, the large interval between each individual fort. That deficiency had been obviated by the breastworks raised just before the arrival of the Germans. Fifty-three thousand Belgian sappers and navvies were employed in the task. Another weakness was the smallness of the garrison. When, in 1890, Sir George Clarke (now Lord Sydenham) reported on the Liége forts to King Leopold, he stated that the forts of Liége and Namur would require 74,000 men for their defence.

"The garrison of one fort is astonishingly small—some eighty men, gunners for long distance, and infantry for repulsing storming parties. Sixteen men working mitrailleuses are said to suffice for sweeping the surroundings of a fort clean of the enemy. They are said to suffer quite as much from the heat, the smoke, and the nervous commotions within as from the attack from outside. I met several men who had been fighting days and days in the forts. They all complained of having had

neither food nor sleep, and yet when they were offered food they would refuse it. The lower jaw projected in an attitude of dogged determination, and they kept abusing the enemy, who was no longer there. Although they were physically exhausted, they showed no sign of yielding or fear. Probably their minds had lost their elasticity, and they just persisted in the moral attitude once taken up. Their sense of discipline remained very strong. They dragged their guns along, though they could hardly stand, and thought only of obeying orders and doing as they had been told." (Hamelius, "The Siege of Liége," p. 45).

## VI

THE German theory was to rush one or two key-forts. This would be all the easier as the enemy was only too well aware of that inadequacy of the garrison to which we have just referred. There can be no doubt that, if the Germans had been allowed to bring their heavy artillery into position from the beginning, they would have succeeded. But they could not afford the time, and they did not think the heavy artillery would be needed. They did not

expect serious resistance, and they were quite prepared to make a heavy sacrifice. All through the war the German commanders have shown that they hold the lives of their soldiers very cheap.

The inadequacy of the garrison was largely compensated by the presence of a commander who from the very outset revealed himself to be one of the most resourceful soldiers of his time. A scientist of repute, and a former professor at the military school of Brussels, General Leman united the keen penetration of mind of the trained mathematician with those moral gifts which make the born leader of men, and which inspire absolute loyalty and confidence.

The three German army corps had been ordered to storm the fortress at whatever cost. They did pay the full cost, and did not win the prize. They advanced in close formation. They made one futile attack after another against Barchon, against Loncin, and especially against Boncelles. Time after time they were repelled. The big Belgian guns cut broad avenues in the German ranks. The attack of the mobile Belgian division followed up the murderous effect of the guns of the forts. Rifles were fired at fifty yards,

and the bayonet completed the work of the rifle. Each onslaught was more desperate. Each repulse was more deadly. On the third day, in their advance against Fort Boncelles, the Germans lost 25,000 in killed and wounded. The German commander sued for an armistice of twenty-four hours to bury his dead. The armistice was refused.

"It was tragic," said a Belgian lancer interviewed by a *Times* correspondent, "the way in which these poor fellows were driven up to the guns of the forts. They came in massed formation, but so reluctantly. It was obvious that they came only under compulsion. They stood but five paces apart, with about fifteen paces between the ranks—a solid mass which even a woman might hit. We simply couldn't miss them. Before our infantry had begun to charge, heaps of dead and dying lay in masses in the fields. I do not believe that anyone realizes what the spectacle was like. From accounts which I have heard, Port Arthur was nothing to it.

"Our men charged repeatedly with fixed bayonets. They did not care. They saw red. Nothing seemed to stop them. Every time

they charged, the German troops turned and ran. They were struck in the back and killed like cattle. It was horrible. Then the cavalry charged them. I have no recollection of what happened to me. I recollect nothing but a great rush—and that my lance was broken. I do not know whether I killed a German or not."

With all its heroism the little garrison was unequal to its tremendous task. The thousand gunners might be sufficient to hold the forts. But they could not for long hold such a vast perimeter. Four days and four nights of ceaseless fighting left the defenders exhausted. The Belgians could not be relieved, whilst the Germans had inexhaustible reserves to draw upon. Sooner or later the enemy must slip through the intervals of the forts. Only a small force might pass, but a small force was all that was required. On the 6th a German detachment managed to cut its way through. Threatened in their line of retreat between the Germans inside and the German forces outside, the Belgian garrison had to retire on Tirlemont and Louvain. This retreat explains the paradox which was so unsettling to the lay mind, of the

forts holding out long after the town itself had been occupied by the enemy. The purpose of the forts was not to hold the city, but to defend the river approaches. In this the forts were successful. Until about August 5 no considerable German forces were able to cross the Meuse. Time after time the German army threw pontoon-bridges above and below Liége. Time after time the bridges were destroyed by the fire of the forts and the Germans repulsed with heavy losses.

## VII

ONCE the Belgian garrison had withdrawn the end could not be indefinitely postponed. The fate of Liége was practically settled from the moment when the Germans were able to bring up their heavy siege artillery. The forts were not able to resist the 42 cm. howitzers. Later events—the fall of Namur and the surrender of the French fortresses—have abundantly proved that no Continental forts could ultimately resist their impact. No doubt, if a sufficiently strong mobile force could have prevented the Germans from placing their heavy artillery into position, the fate of Liége might

have been warded off. It was not to be. In the second half of August all the Liége forts were in the hands of the enemy.

The object of the defence had been fully attained. The resistance of Liége is not only one of the most magnificent achievements in military annals, it is also, as we have already said, one of the decisive events in world history.

The narrative of the defence of Liége may be fittingly concluded with a letter which the heroic commander, General Leman, wrote to King Albert. General Leman was not allowed to see the end of a siege which was to hand down his name to posterity. He was wounded and made a prisoner after the explosion of the Fort of Loncin. From his prison he sent the following message to his Sovereign :

“After a severe engagement fought on August 4, 5, and 6, I considered that the forts of Liége could not play any other part but that of stopping the advance of the enemy. I maintained the military government in order to co-ordinate the defence as much as possible and in order to exert a moral influence on the garrison.

"Your Majesty is aware that I was at the Fort of Loncin on August 6 at noon.

"Your Majesty will learn with sorrow that the fort exploded yesterday at 5.20 P.M., and that the greater part of the garrison is buried under the ruins. If I have not died in this catastrophe, it is owing to the fact that my work has removed me from the stronghold. Whilst I was being suffocated by the gases after the explosion of the powder, a German captain gave me a drink. I was then made a prisoner and brought to Liége. I am aware that this letter is lacking in sequence, but I am physically shaken by the explosion of the Fort of Loncin. For the honour of our armies I have refused to surrender the fortress and the forts. May your Majesty deign to forgive me. In Germany, where I am taken, my thoughts will be, as they have always been, with Belgium and her King. I would willingly have given my life better to serve them, but death has not been granted me.

(Signed) GENERAL LEMAN."



# CHAPTER IX

## THE STRATEGY OF THE BELGIAN AND THE FRENCH CAMPAIGNS

### A PARALLEL AND A CONTRAST

#### I

OTHER factors being equal, strategy in modern warfare is largely determined by the size of the armies, by the technical equipment and armament, by the configuration of the theatre of war, by the facilities of roads and railways, and by the resources of the country. In this respect there are very great differences between the three theatres of operations in France, Russia, and Belgium. To take the two extremes: in Russia the armies are large, the roads are few, and the country is poor; in Belgium the army is small, the roads are innumerable, and the country is rich.

The differences which result from those conditions may be most clearly and briefly defined by saying that the methods of the

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French campaign are those of *extensive* warfare ; in the Belgian campaign they are those of *intensive* warfare. In the French campaign the methods are mainly *defensive* ; in the Belgian they have been mainly *offensive*. The fighting in France has been deliberate, scientific. The allied armies have been in the grip of a tremendous machine. In Belgium we are still concerned with old methods of warfare, where each man retains his full value, where man is pitted against man, battalion against battalion, where we still hear of frontal attacks, of cavalry charges, of incidents and surprises.

### II

IN surveying the French campaign, the first point which must, of course, strike us is the huge size of the forces. So far as we can estimate the numbers, there must be at present confronting each other in France between two and a half and three million soldiers. Those unwieldy masses have created entirely different conditions. There has never been anything even remotely approaching those figures. In some of his greatest battles Napoleon did not have 100,000 men !

The first consequence is the immense development of the battle-front, which extends from two to three hundred miles in a thin, loose line, where the units are so widely separated that each man is very much left to his own resources, and it is almost impossible to transmit orders. That extension of the battle-front is not only due to the difficulties of the commissariat, it is mainly due to the impossibility of moving such masses within a restricted space. A million men in arms must have elbow-room to deploy and to manœuvre.

Nor must we forget that the extension of the battle-front is still further rendered necessary by the deadly effect of modern weapons. To advance in serried ranks in close formation would be simply collective suicide. The Germans have tried frontal attacks in close formation at Liége and elsewhere, but the slaughter has been appalling, and before many weeks were over the Germans had to give up their antiquated methods.

### III

A SECOND consequence of the huge size of the armies is the extreme slowness of any combined

movement, and in sound strategy all important movements must needs be combined. As Napoleon said, an army marches on its stomach. If this was true of an army of 100,000 men, how much more true of armies of a million. Movements must necessarily be slow. Firstly, because the supplies for a million men must be drawn from a very wide area ; secondly, because ammunition has to be brought up from a distance of hundreds of miles ; and, thirdly, because it is extremely difficult to ensure close co-operation between the different parts of a huge army moving on a two-hundred-mile front. Those enormous masses must move together. The right wing must proceed at the same pace as the left wing two hundred miles away. It is the slowest which shall needs regulate the pace. As the line must be made up in a loose formation, there is all the greater danger to the whole army that the advancing line may be cut in two by the enemy because the line is very thin. Slow and cautious advances are therefore essential to safety. Any undue hurry would spell disaster.

The advance of the Russian armies on the Prussian frontier may be taken as typical of the

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slow rate of a large modern army. Armchair strategists have been prophesying for a good many weeks the arrival of the Russian hosts at Berlin and Vienna. They have wondered at the tardy progress of the Russians. They forget that the problem in Prussia and Galicia is largely one of provisions and ammunition, and that in those countries roads are few and supplies are scarce. On the other hand, it would seem as if the rapidity of the German advance in Northern France is in striking contradiction to our principles. The Germans moved their huge masses from the Belgian frontier to the neighbourhood of Paris in less than a week. Whether the initial strategy of the Germans will ultimately end in disaster or not, it must be admitted that this rapid advance is one of the most prodigious achievements of modern times. But already the results of the progress of the German armies through Northern France have been more brilliant than substantial. The advance has been a striking spectacular display and a convincing demonstration of the efficiency of the military machine. At the same time, the Germans have overreached themselves, and at the most critical

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moment their progress has been suddenly arrested. The Prussian armies arrived near Paris in a state of utter exhaustion, and were compelled to retreat just when they were arriving near the goal. The obvious conclusion is that in their advance towards Paris the German armies simply ignored one fundamental law of modern warfare. *C'était magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre!* It was magnificent, but it was against the laws of war.

### IV

ANOTHER consequence of the huge size of modern armies, of their extensive formation and of their slow movement, is the alarming predominance of artillery. That predominance is no doubt partly due to the amazing progress in the science of destruction. The German howitzer guns of 42 cm. have been a revelation to the world, and they have largely changed the conditions of the campaign. But, even apart from the scientific progress of modern artillery, its predominance is also a direct result of the conditions which regulate the march of a large army.

When day after day a large army has to wait for both supplies and ammunition, when the

right wing has to wait until the left wing is ready for a general advance, the other parts of the army cannot remain indefinitely on exposed ground, open to any surprise attack. They will instinctively seek the protection of a strong position, and they will try to make that position stronger by artificial earthworks. And the enemy will have to dislodge them from those fortified positions. In other words, the modern battle tends more and more to be a "siege" battle. No more is it the classic encounter finished in a few hours, begun at dawn and culminating at dusk. The titanic siege battle of the Rivers, which has now lasted for months, and which is not yet completed at the moment of writing, is entirely typical of modern warfare. The battles of the present may be even more deadly than in the past, but they give little scope for active heroism. The soldier does not go out to meet his death. He has to wait for it in the trenches with passive and stoical resignation.

## V

ANOTHER consequence of the modern conditions of warfare is the subordinate part played by

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cavalry. No doubt the cavalry still has an important *rôle* to play. It still has to reconnoitre. It still has to screen the movements of the infantry. It still has to cut the lines of communication. But even there the aeroplane, the dirigible balloon, and especially the motor-car, armoured or unarmoured, have largely supplied the part of the cavalry. And what is more significant, the strict co-operation of the cavalry with the infantry and artillery during the battle has almost entirely ceased. We shall hear no more of the pomp and circumstance of war, so far as cavalry is concerned. We shall hear no more of Charges of the Light Brigade. Cavalry charges on the classical lines are almost as antiquated as the rousing music of the battlefield. Even in Belgium in four weeks on the theatre of war I did not once see a single cavalry attack in support of infantry or artillery, just as I did not once hear the beat of the drum or the flourish of the clarion.

## VI

THE final consequence of the modern methods and of the huge masses engaged is that war tends

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to be indefinitely protracted and indecisive. In this connexion again the present war presents a striking contrast to previous wars, even to that of 1870. The French campaign of 1870 was practically decided in three weeks. In the present campaign of 1914 the battle of the Rivers alone has lasted longer than the whole decisive stage of the war of 1870. A siege battle is necessarily a slow business, and before the enemy is dislodged from one strong position he has had time to establish himself in another. It must therefore be obvious in the present war that if military considerations alone had to decide the issue, the war might be protracted for years, however deadly the campaign might prove to be. It is not easy even in a long succession of battles to kill off 15,000,000 human beings. But most certainly the final result will not be settled by military, but by economic and political factors. Long before Germany is finally beaten she will be threatened with starvation, which will probably result in a political revolution.

## VII

SUCH, then, are the general lines of the French campaign. How very different has been the strategy of the Belgian campaign! Its strategy has entirely falsified the theories which had been previously held. The Belgian campaign was expected to be a war of fortresses. On the contrary, it has developed mainly into a guerilla warfare. The French campaign was expected to be mainly offensive in conformity with the impetuous French character, with the *furia francese*. It has developed mainly into a defensive strategy.

To the most casual observer it must be apparent that the conditions of the Belgian campaign have little in common with the conditions of the French campaign. The Belgian Army is small, and, therefore, distances can easily be covered. The country possesses a unique network of roads and railways, therefore troops can easily be moved. The country is rich and fertile, therefore troops can easily be fed.

In the first place, the small size of the Belgian Army has determined the size of the Belgian battlefields. The frontage of a Belgian engage-

ment has never exceeded more than a few miles. I was present at the battle of Malines, in which from 130,000 to 150,000 were engaged. From beginning to end I could easily survey all the operations of the battlefield.

Further, the Belgian armies have been much more mobile. They have never to wait for supplies. They do not even require to depend on the railway. They have been able to resort to the motor-car. At the military headquarters in Louvain one of the most striking sights were the motor-cars starting every morning and afternoon with provisions for the fighting line.

Owing to its extraordinary mobility, the Belgian army has been continually shifting its ground from day to day and sometimes from hour to hour. And just as this mobility has made the Belgian army much more active, it has also made it more efficient as a fighting force. All the arms—infantry, artillery, and cavalry—could co-operate. It could not remain on the defensive. It could not entrench itself. Its very safety lay in attacking. But while continually attacking, it could fight great battles. It had to wage a perpetual guerilla warfare. It

had to harass the enemy. It had to make surprise sorties. It had to cut the enemy's lines of communication. Briefly, in such guerilla warfare the cavalry played a much more important part.

### VIII

As I have just said, continuous fighting and the perpetual mobility of the Belgian Army kept it at the highest pitch of efficiency and brought out the full value of the soldier. But the wear-and-tear of such guerilla warfare is appalling. Casualties in the Belgian campaign may not have been unduly severe in proportion to those of the French campaign. But the expenditure of energy has been very much greater. The Belgian soldier has always been on the *qui vive*. He has been given no rest. He has always been in danger of being cut off from his main base. Where there is only one single army, where an army is entirely thrown on its own resources, it must combine the contradictory qualities of constant activity and of extreme caution. Further, because it is the sole army there are no reserves to draw upon. It cannot renew itself, nor recuperate, nor fill in its losses.

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There lay the danger for the Belgian forces. Heroism could achieve much, but even heroism could not indefinitely resist the physical and psychological strain to which the Belgian Army was being put. Heroism may defy death—it cannot change the laws of Nature.



## CHAPTER X

### THE TRAGIC ISOLATION OF BELGIUM AND THE TRUE CAUSE OF THE FALL OF NAMUR

#### I

**I**T was always understood that the only function of Belgian defence was to delay the German advance and to give the Allied Armies time to rush to the rescue. The theory was that, if the Germans could only be held up for forty-eight hours, Belgium would have played its allotted part. The Belgians did play their allotted part. They not only did their duty, they did more than their duty. They held up the German advance for forty-eight hours, for five days, for fourteen days. But the allied troops did not come to succour the Belgians in their desperate plight.

We war correspondents did not understand why the Allies did not appear on the scene and we felt uncomfortable as we passed through Belgium. Wherever it leaked out that we were British, we were confronted by anxious Belgians.

It was always the same question which was on everybody's lips : "Où sont les Anglais ?" "Où sont les Français ?" But both the French and Sir John French were too far away to help the two thousand little Belgian gunners shut up in their cupola forts, isolated from the rest of humanity.

## II

IT was a mystery, and we wanted to clear up the mystery. For days we motored on all the high roads of Belgium which were still unoccupied by the Germans, in quest of the Allies. But somehow the Allied Army seemed to vanish at our approach. I dubbed it the "phantom army," and the definition seemed appropriate. It is true that ocular witnesses had seen the French and British troops. They could even locate their exact position. They had gone far north to cut off the German lines of communication. They were entrenched in the camp of Beverloo, in Limburg. But, alas ! we discovered that in time of war ocular witnesses can hardly be trusted, and that the war fever produces the strangest hallucinations. What the ocular witnesses possibly had seen was one

remarkable motor-car, with one British military attaché, with a Belgian chauffeur, also in khaki, and a Belgian interpreter, also in khaki. That solitary British officer, with the two Belgians dressed in khaki, represented to the Belgian people for many anxious days all the might and majesty of the British Army. For that motor-car was ubiquitous. I saw it at Louvain ; I saw it at Namur and Dinant. I again found it in the small hours of the morning at Mons, after my escape from the capital. Everywhere this solitary British motor-car made the Belgian people believe that the English Army had actually arrived. As war correspondents we had good reason to notice that remarkable British car. It first had seemed to follow us. We soon found that it was in our interest to follow it. Just then the spy mania was at its height. On our way from Brussels to the French frontier we had been arrested for three hours at Namur as German spies. It suddenly dawned upon us that the best way to escape suspicion was to follow closely in the wake of the British motor-car. We seemed to form part of its suite. We shared in the enthusiasm which its passage called forth amongst Belgians, civilians and

soldiers alike. From that enthusiasm we first realized what British and French support actually meant to the Belgians. We realized what a few French or British regiments might have done to restore confidence to the much-tried Belgian troops.

### III

WHY, then, it will be asked, did the Allied Armies not come to the rescue of the Belgians? Why were the two thousand little Belgian gunners allowed to fight alone in their cupola forts? The reason is only too obvious. The Allies were not ready. Far be it from me to make any complaint or to pass any judgment. I am merely stating a fact, and it is a fact which is not in the slightest degree disparaging to the Allies. The preparedness of the Germans will redound to their eternal shame. The unpreparedness of the Allies will redound to their lasting honour.

The Allies were not ready because they had been taken by surprise, and they had been taken by surprise because they had trusted in the good faith and pacific professions of the Germans. Germany was negotiating for peace, and all the time was treacherously massing her troops on

the Belgian frontier, with the result that twenty-four hours after the declaration of war three army corps were appearing before Liége. France and England continued to negotiate for peace in all sincerity, with the result that on the declaration of war England was not able for ten days to disembark her troops, and France had to think of her own defence instead of rushing to the defence of the Belgians.

#### IV

THE Belgians, of course, were not told the real reason why they were not assisted. They could not be told that the Allies were not ready. They were told that the French and English were prevented from co-operating mainly for "strategic reasons." They were told that the general plan of campaign had best be carried out, independently of Belgium; that it was better that Belgium should be left to her fate; that the occupation of Brussels was merely a spectacular display; and that it was better far that Brussels, which was undefended, should be taken than that the Germans should threaten the capital and stronghold of France.

The Belgians accepted the explanation. One

might have sympathized with the Belgians if they had keenly felt their abandonment, if they had bitterly resented the humiliation of the capture of Brussels, the horrors of Louvain. As a matter of fact, they did not complain. The attitude of the Belgians in this connexion was strikingly characteristic of the magnanimous disposition which they showed all through the crisis. As I suggested in a previous chapter we shall best understand their temper when we say that it was almost mystical. To them, indeed, this was a Holy War, and in a Holy War one must be prepared to suffer vicariously. One must be resigned to be a martyr, a witness for a common cause.

## V

ALTHOUGH the Belgians did not complain, although their attitude was calmly resigned, yet the abandonment of Belgium had fatal consequences. It no doubt sealed the doom of Liége and Namur. Military critics have wondered at the fall of Namur, and certainly at first sight the immediate collapse of Namur was only less surprising than the persistence of the defence of Liége. The Namur forts

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were apparently quite sufficiently manned and equipped. They had ample ammunition. The town had a superabundance of provisions. Yet the formidable stronghold fell to the enemy almost at the first attack, as soon as the Germans brought their heavy artillery.

Several explanations have been given. It has been said that the little Belgian Army was not sufficient to defend and garrison three such forts as Liége, Namur, and Antwerp, and at the same time keep in reserve a field force. It has been said that the desertion of the Allies utterly demoralized the besieged. Neither explanation seems to me adequate. The Belgian garrison amounted to 26,000 well-trained troops. They were sufficiently prepared for any sacrifice. As a matter of fact, out of that gallant division of 26,000 only 12,000 survived.

But from the beginning there was a misunderstanding as to the relative parts to be played by the Belgians and by the Allies, and it is that misunderstanding which ultimately proved fatal. The Belgians depended on the Allies to oppose the approach of the enemy. They made no sorties, trusting to outside co-operation. They kept to the defensive, whereas

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a vigorous offensive alone could have saved the situation. It is true that, the German heavy siege guns once placed in position, nothing could save the Namur forts. But it would have been possible to prevent the Germans from bringing out their heavy artillery. It is the inaction of General Michel which lost the stronghold to the Belgian Army, and that inaction was entirely the result of the misunderstanding referred to. If the Allies had clearly intimated that they were not going to co-operate with the Belgians, the Belgians would have exchanged their defensive for offensive tactics, Namur would have been saved, a joint Belgian and French army would have harassed the Germans in the rear, and the advance of the enemy into France would have been checked.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE OCCUPATION OF BRUSSELS

#### I

THE War of the Nations has brought us countless surprises. It is the unexpected which has constantly been happening. Everybody expected that Italy would join her allies. Italy has remained neutral. Everybody expected that Liége would not resist. Liége has opposed an indomitable resistance. Everybody expected that Namur would hold out. Namur has fallen after thirty-six hours. Everybody expected that the French forts would hold back the tide of German invasion. Nearly all the French forts surrendered almost without a blow. Everybody expected that the French artillery would be superior to the German artillery. Nobody suspected the existence, and still less the power, of the heavy German 16 in. howitzers. Yet that heavy German artillery has been the main instrument of German advance. Everybody expected that the eastern French

frontiers, strongly protected, would be the main scene of operations. Yet it is the Belgian frontier, almost unprotected, which has been the principal theatre of the war. Everybody expected that Great Britain would only be able to send an "Expeditionary Force." Before this war is far advanced Great Britain will have sent an army of two million trained soldiers into the plains of France.

## II

THE occupation of Brussels was one of the unexpected events of the Belgian campaign. Belgian public opinion has been kept in the dark by the optimism of the official dispatches. The authorities probably realized that one of the prime necessities was to keep up the spirits of the people. It was proclaimed that Brussels would be quite capable of defending itself. A line of trenches encircled the southern and eastern approaches of the capital. The Civic Guard had been drilled and had been preparing for two weeks to receive the enemy. Yet at the first news of the approach of the German enemy the Civic Guard was disbanded without preliminary notice. No resistance was to be

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offered to the invader. The capital was to be surrendered without a blow.

The position of the central Government was keenly resented by the population. Yet the surrender was probably wise and inevitable. The whole military situation in Belgium had changed by the inability of the French to come to the rescue. The German army would have been able to bring up without delay its heavy siege artillery. Brussels would have been subjected to a bombardment which would have destroyed the historical monuments of one of the most glorious art cities of the world. The destruction would have been all the more certain because the German army did not recognize the Belgian militia as engaged in legitimate warfare. They threatened to treat them as sharpshooters and to wreak ruthless vengeance on the Belgian capital.

### III

I HAD left the military headquarters of Louvain for twenty-four hours to receive my instructions from the London authorities of the *Daily Chronicle*. I returned to Brussels on Wednesday night. I went at once to the offices of the *Soir* and of the *Indépendance* to

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try to engage a motor-car for the next day. Every motor-car had been commandeered. At the *Gazette de Bruxelles* I met the editor, M. van Zype, who was just leaving his office. A messenger arrived. The editor did not open the message, as his paper had gone to press. The messenger insisted that the news was urgent and important. It was a letter from the Burgomaster of Brussels announcing the imminent arrival of the Germans and recommending calm and dignity to the citizens. M. van Zype received the news with the calm stoicism which in those days characterized all Belgians: "It is all over for the present. We can only shut shop. There will be no Belgian newspapers for a few months. We are going to have a compulsory holiday. In the meantime, to-morrow, we shall have the goose-step and a fine military display in the best German style. As for yourself, you had better leave at once. Remember, you are a marked man. You are on the black list. You have said a few strong things against our German friends, and you know that occasionally they can be very vindictive. *Au revoir*, good luck!"

With a heavy heart I left my beloved city of Brussels. I say *my* city because, as Doctor of the University of Brussels, I have been connected for twenty years with the University of the capital. But the advice of my Brussels colleague was wise. Even if it had been possible for me to stay in Brussels, my activity as "war correspondent" would have come to an end. I went to the Gare du Nord. I found the gates locked and all the trains gone. I went to the Gare du Sud. I found all the trains gone. I was informed that there was still one special military train which was due to leave at midnight. I asked permission of the colonel in command to join the train. Permission was refused. I disregarded the order, and I slipped into the corridor, the only civilian on the train. In the short hours of the morning I arrived at Mons, where two days afterwards was to begin the Battle of Nations.

The German military authorities have been repeatedly criticized for the occupation of Brussels. It was said that the occupation was a mere spectacular display, that it could serve no object, that "strategic conditions" were being sacrificed to vanity and to the desire of humili-

iliating the Belgians. These criticisms are absurd. The occupation of Brussels was for the German armies an obvious and necessary move. It was to the outside world a signal consecration of their triumph. There was an urgent necessity to retrieve the check received at Liége, and to produce a moral effect on the Belgian population. Moreover Brussels was the headquarters of the Government, and its occupation by the enemy meant the dislocation of the whole administrative machinery. Brussels was also the centre of the Belgian railway system, on the cross-roads of the Antwerp, Ghent, Liége, and Charleroi lines. It was highly important, even for "strategic reasons," that Brussels should be in German hands. Nor was Brussels less important as a centre of supplies and provisions. Brussels could be held with a few troops, and the maximum of military advantage could be secured at the minimum of cost.

The German army entered Brussels on a glorious August afternoon to the rhythm of their famous goose-step, insolent and aggressive, singing in turn love-ditties and patriotic songs. The actual corps of occupation was only about

30,000, but for days a continuous stream of soldiers, over 600,000, was poured into the city on the way to the shambles of the battlefield.

The German troops did not commit any excesses. The German commander knew that the eyes of the whole world were upon him. In almost every other city the Germans had given themselves over to orgies of drink. In Brussels the commander prohibited the sale of alcoholic liquor. Only the superior officers were allowed to sack the cellars of the Royal Palace of Laaken. The German soldiers were quartered in barracks and public buildings. Only officers were billeted in private houses.

That no excesses should have been committed was due no doubt to the restraint of public opinion, but not least to the firm attitude of Burgomaster Max. The burgomaster of a Belgian city is not an ornamental and ephemeral figure like the Mayor of an English city. The importance of a Belgian burgomaster is in proportion to the importance of the civic life. A Belgian mayor is practically appointed for life and invested with full powers. In Brussels the first magistrate of the capital is the first personage after the King.

Burgomaster Max worthily sustained the traditions of his office. Through his tact and diplomatic skill, through his firmness and dignity, he ensured the safety of Brussels. The slightest mistake on the part of the civic authorities might have spelt disaster to the city. The slightest popular disturbance in the Quartier des Marolles might have brought down on the city the vengeance of the conqueror.

Although no outrages were perpetrated, Brussels was made to feel heavily the yoke of the invader. The Germans continued in the city their methods of predatory warfare. Huge quantities of foodstuffs were commandeered for the 600,000 German troops that were continually passing through. Payment was made in grim mockery in bills on the National Bank of Belgium. A war indemnity of 200,000,000 francs was imposed on the city of Brussels, and one of 450,000,000 francs on the province of Brabant. In order to ensure the payment of this huge indemnity by a ruined city and by a stricken province, the Germans revived the abominable practice of hostages. Baron Lambert de Rothschild was mulcted to

the extent of 10,000,000 francs. The venerable M. Solvay, the leader of Belgian industry, was subjected to a fine of 30,000,000 francs. With characteristic pedantry the Germans combined their methods of predatory warfare with a concern for the interests of German culture. In order to show their special concern for German science, they changed Greenwich time for the German time. The change was symbolical. Forsooth, under German rule, Brussels was to be sixty minutes in advance of London.

Although no excesses were committed, and although Brussels did not share the fate of the doomed cities of Louvain, Malines, Dinant, and Termonde, yet under the surface there was an appalling amount of suffering which increased with every day of the occupation. Brussels henceforth was cut off from all connexion with the remainder of Belgium. No newspapers were published and no Belgian news was obtainable. Prices rose rapidly, from the scarcity of supplies and from the necessity of feeding the German hosts. The shadow of distress deepened. Brussels trade is largely concerned with the luxuries of life, and this was not a

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time to spend money on luxuries. Brussels trade is generally largely dependent on Court and Society. The Court had moved to Antwerp, and Society had dispersed. The Foreign Colony had left. Foreign schools were closed.

Brussels hitherto had been the gayest and brightest centre of the Continent. On the eve of Waterloo Brussels was still a busy centre of social life. To-day the capital was bowing its head in bitter humiliation. She was in close grip with poverty. She was wrapped in gloom and mourning.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE BATTLE OF MALINES

I WAS present at the battle of Malines with my friend, M. Emile Vandervelde, Secretary of State, and Mr. Powell, correspondent of the *New York World*. I was the only British war correspondent to witness the two days' engagement, from the inspiring forward march on the first day until the no less impressive retreat on the second day.

Although the battle of Malines cannot be compared in point of numbers with such titanic struggles as the battle of Mons, although it cannot be compared in importance with the defence of Liége, it will rank in military history as one of the most characteristic achievements of the Belgian campaign. And although the Belgian army had ultimately to fall back on Antwerp, the main object of the Belgian advance movement was attained.

That object was not to recapture Brussels from the enemy. As we stated before, with admirable self-sacrifice the Belgians from the beginning subordinated their own national

interests to the general plan of the Allied armies. One aim was to clear the approaches to Antwerp and to prevent the Germans from bringing up their heavy siege artillery and establishing themselves on the main road between Louvain and Waelhem, the most southern fort of Antwerp. But the chief object of the Belgian advance was to co-operate from the north with the advance of the Allied armies from the south and to relieve the pressure of the German attack and to divert from the main German army at least two, and perhaps three, army corps.

When the Belgians took the offensive on Tuesday morning the Germans were in possession of Malines and their outposts were only from nine to ten miles from Antwerp. When we arrived on Tuesday afternoon we found the town of Malines frantic with joy at being delivered from the German hordes. Everywhere the population was acclaiming the Belgian soldiers. We had expected that the town would have suffered heavily from a two days' previous bombardment. As a matter of fact, there were only a few houses destroyed. The stained-glass of the cathedral was slightly damaged.

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It was left to a later bombardment to destroy the venerable seat of the Archbishop-Primate, the Canterbury of Belgium.

On Tuesday afternoon the Belgians advanced as far as Eppeghem, near Vilvorde. On the way we passed the soldiers of the 3rd Division, the heroes of the siege of Liége. After a week's well-earned rest they were again eager to take part in the fray. On our arrival the battle had already begun. About 130,000 men were engaged, 50,000 Belgians and 80,000 Germans—the 1st, 4th, and 6th Belgian Divisions and two German army corps. Before the vigorous attack of the Belgian cavalry and infantry the Germans steadily retired, burning everything as they retreated. Everywhere we saw the smoke of burning villages. We heard of the usual atrocities, which have now almost become inseparable from German military operations. I myself saw in the main street of the village of Sempst amongst the crumbling ruins of burning houses the bodies of a farmer and of his son horribly mutilated and punctured by German lances. In the neighbourhood of the farmhouse we were able to rescue six ladies, who were transported in our motor to Malines.

All through the afternoon the Belgians fought with magnificent *élan*. There can be no doubt that if the Belgian attack had been supported by the Allied armies Brussels would have been retaken. But the Belgian ranks gradually thinned and could not be replaced. There were no reserves to draw upon. On the other hand, the enemy had considerable reinforcements, and the Belgians had consequently to sleep on their positions.

It must have been a short sleep and a restless night for the harassed Belgian troops. The battle was resumed with dawn at 4.30 A.M. From the high bank of the railway line from Brussels to Antwerp we could survey the whole of the battlefield. We could see at once that the second day would not turn out so favourably for the Belgians as the first. The Germans, with their heavy reinforcements, were able to take the offensive all along the line, and early in the morning all their batteries were brought into play. From one o'clock until four P.M. shrapnel burst like hailstones around us. Nor was it possible for the Belgian cavalry and infantry to make an enveloping movement, as the enemy had an overwhelming superiority

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in numbers. In the meantime the Belgian General Staff had received the bad news of a severe check to the Allies. In the course of the morning the General Staff of the 1st Division at village of X were informed that the offensive of the Allies, on which the Belgians had counted, could not take place, and that the Belgians were left to their own resources. It was felt that it would be a criminal waste of life to sacrifice the brave Belgian troops to an attack which could not be followed up, all the more so as the main object of the Belgian strategical movement had been attained. The retreat was decided on.

My friend M. Vandervelde, and Mr. Powell, of the *New York World*, remained with me to the end. We had a few lively moments. M. Vandervelde, with a Belgian journalist, had been left in charge of the motor on the road to cover our retreat. Mr. Powell and myself climbed the high bank of the railway to see the Germans emerge from the arches of three railway viaducts. Whilst with our field-glasses we were on the look-out for the Uhlans, we were suddenly distracted by cries of distress from our Belgian companions. Carabinier cyclists were flying past and shouting that the Uhlans were only

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500 yards away from us. It is hardly necessary to add that we lost no time in leaving the railway bank.

We passed over the battlefield of yesterday, and in every direction we stumbled across the bodies of dead soldiers and carcasses of dead horses and cattle. We noticed that all the German corpses were in their stockings. A gravedigger explained to us that the German boots were so excellent that the first care of the Belgian soldier was to help himself to the boots of the enemy. On every side we saw the wreckage of the battlefield, unused cartridges, blood-soiled uniforms and headgear, fragments of bombshells, and German postcards without number which were not to be sent to their destination.

The Belgians retreated in admirable order, if a strategic movement, which falls back upon its main line after the object of the movement has been achieved, can be called a retreat. The soldiers were in excellent spirits, although sobered after the heavy fighting of the last two days and sorely disappointed at being stopped on their march to Brussels. My colleague, Mr. Powell, was amazed at the *morale* of

the retreating Belgian troops. In his long experience of fifteen years as a war-correspondent he had never met the equal of the Belgian soldier for simple heroism, for cheerfulness and staying power.

But while the Belgian army itself moved in wonderful order, there moved also another column towards Antwerp which was a scene of wild confusion. We were fated to see on one and the same day all the pomp and circumstance, all the tragic grandeur, but also all the hideous horror of war. Tens of thousands of refugees were flying to Antwerp under the protection of the troops, a mass of distracted humanity, dazed and haggard men, women, and children of all classes, many of the children and old women huddled into carts. I saw one grandmother with a baby in her arms trundled in a wheelbarrow by a boy. Malines, which in the morning we had found full of animation, by five o'clock in the afternoon had become a melancholy desert. The population had fled in a panic. Even thus every Belgian city and village for the last three weeks had become a desert at the mere intimation of the approach of the German hordes.



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE DESTRUCTION OF LOUVAIN

#### I

ON September 1 a procession of refugees from Louvain arrived at Malines in a frenzy of terror with the news that the town of Louvain had been set on fire by the Germans and that the whole city was a heap of ruins. The wildest stories added to the horror of the tale. It was said that there had been a wholesale massacre of men, women, and children, and that hundreds of priests, and especially Jesuits, had been singled out for murder. Many of the stories proved to be without any foundation. But when all the exaggerations had been discounted there remained a body of substantial facts that were enough to send a thrill of indignation through Europe.

Two certainties emerged from the chaos of conflicting evidence. First, there had been indiscriminate slaughter of civilians and looting of property. Secondly, the Germans, armed with incendiary fuses and obeying the order of the military authorities, had methodically burned

the whole section of Louvain which extends from the station in the centre of the town, including the University and the church of St. Pierre.

Since the destruction of the hapless University town other atrocities have followed in almost daily succession, Termonde, Aerschot, Malines, Antwerp. The world has almost got accustomed to them. There has been nothing like this mad fury of destruction in the whole history of modern warfare. Reims has outdone even Louvain, and the ruin of the Cathedral of Reims is an even greater loss than the destruction of the old Belgian Catholic University.

Still Louvain remains the one crowning infamy. German casuistry may at least find some extenuating circumstances in the fact that Reims was a fortified town, and that the Cathedral tower might have been used as an observation post for the French armies. For the crime of Louvain no extenuating circumstance can be urged. Louvain was undefended. It was a peaceful city of students, priests, and landladies. It was in the occupation of the Germans. Its destruction, therefore, was both a wanton and a cowardly act of cruelty, and being

both wanton and cruel, it will stand out as the typical atrocity of German militarism.

Only those who are familiar with the history of Belgium and Brabant, and with the history of Belgian Universities, know what Louvain and the University stood for. Founded in 1425, in the days of Petrarch, Froissart, and Chaucer, it was one of the oldest and most illustrious seats of learning in Europe. It was the seat of Pope Adrian VI, the tutor of Charles V. It still remained the most famous Catholic University in the world. It still attracted scholars from every country. It was still the nursery of Irish, English, and American priests.

And not only had Louvain 500 years of learning behind it, it was also a city with a magnificent municipal tradition. The town hall, one of the gems of Gothic architecture, was a glorious monument to that municipal tradition. By the destruction of Louvain the German soldiery have wiped out five centuries of religious and intellectual culture and of municipal freedom.

Any final account of the tragedy must necessarily be premature. Details are still wanting and cannot be filled in while the German occu-

pation lasts. We can only examine the meagre evidence before us. But, such as it is, the evidence is more than sufficient to formulate a judgment and to allocate the responsibilities.

We must first deal with the German apologia. Wherever the Germans have perpetrated some atrocious crime they have used the same threadbare excuse—the shooting of German soldiers by civilians. Civilians fired on German soldiers at Visé, therefore Visé was razed to the ground. The fourteen-year-old son of the Burgomaster of Aerschot killed a German officer, therefore the whole city of Aerschot had to be destroyed. Similarly, it was to avenge the murder of German soldiers that Louvain was burned. It is the civilian population of Louvain who must ultimately be held responsible.

On the face of it, the German version is an incredible invention. Louvain was in the occupation of German troops. *All the arms had been handed in days before by the civil population.* The authorities had posted placards recommending tranquillity to the population, and warning them that any individual act of hostility would bring down instant vengeance. Those placards could still be read on the walls on the

day of the destruction of Louvain. Under those circumstances, is it credible that a few peaceful citizens should have brought down destruction upon themselves and upon their fellow-citizens by their own deliberate act, which they knew would be met with instant and ruthless retribution?

But even assuming that individual Belgians had been guilty of firing on the German troops, supposing a civilian exasperated by the monstrous treatment described in the narrative of Mr. Van Ernem,\* the Town Treasurer,

\* When the Belgian troops were repulsed by the enemy's crushing numbers, and the Germans had put their big guns in position on all the heights dominating the town, the Germans sent a deputation to the Burgomaster, who agreed to receive the officers to hear their proposals and conditions for occupying the town.

The German General with his état-major then came to the town hall to confer with the Burgomaster, councillors, and myself as treasurer of the town.

These were the stipulated conditions.

First : That the town should fully provide for the invaders, in consideration of which no war contributions would be exacted.

Secondly : The soldiers not billeted in private houses were to pay cash for all goods obtained ; also, they were not to molest the inhabitants under any circumstances.

These stipulations, agreed to on both sides, were most scrupulously kept by the Belgians, but not by the Germans. On certain days, for example, the Germans would exact

why should these individual deeds have been visited on thousands of innocent and inoffensive people? Why should those deeds have been 67,000 lb. of meat, and would let 20,000 lb. of it rot, although the population were suffering from hunger.

On Monday, August 24, towards 10 P.M., the Burgomaster—a respectable merchant, sixty-two years of age—was arrested in his bed, where he was lying ill. He was forced to rise and marched to the railway station, where it was demanded of him that he should provide immediately 250 warm meals and as many mattresses for the soldiers, under penalty of being shot. With admirable dispatch the inhabitants rushed to comply with the German demand. In their solicitude and pity for their aged chief, and their anxiety to save his life, they gave their own beds and their last drops of wine.

The Germans acted without the slightest consideration or regard for the faithful promises of their état-major. The troops rushed into private houses, making forcible entrances, and taking from old and young, many of the latter already orphans, whatever they fancied, paying for nothing except with paper money to be presented to the “caisse communal” at the end of the war.

The promise of exemption from contribution to a war levy was violated, like every other contract. Failing to find enough money in the treasury, the Germans in authority ordered the immediate payment of 100,000 francs.

This large sum could not be gathered from the inhabitants, and nearly all the banks had on the first warning of the approach of the enemy succeeded in transferring their funds to the National Bank.

Finally, after much bickering, the officer in command of the German troops agreed to accept 3000 fr., to be paid the next day. But with the next morning came a further demand for 5000 fr. The Burgomaster vigorously protested against this new exaction; but nevertheless I, as treasurer of the town,

visited on monuments of brick and stone? Why should treasures of learning and shrines of religion be destroyed? Why should the six

was held responsible for collecting 5000 fr. With the greatest difficulty I succeeded in procuring 3080 fr., and after considerable bickering this sum was accepted by the enemy, and the horrors of reprisals were delayed. The population, conscious of the terrible risk which they ran, submitted with calm resignation to the inevitable. As a functionary of the city, I can vouch personally for the absolutely dignified and passive attitude of the whole population of Louvain. They understood perfectly well their grave individual responsibility, and that any breach of their promises would be instantly met by crushing action.

The position of affairs was minutely explained to the inhabitants in several printed proclamations, and they were personally warned by our venerable Burgomaster. Good order was so rigorously maintained that the German authorities praised the exemplary conduct of the inhabitants.

This attitude was all the more laudable because the invaders, immediately upon entering the city, liberated nine of their compatriots who had been incarcerated before the war for murder, theft, and other felonies.

At last, on the Tuesday night, there took place the unspeakable crime, the shame of which can be understood only by those who followed and watched the different phases of the German occupation of Louvain.

It is a significant fact that the German wounded and sick, including their Red Cross nurses, were all removed from the hospitals. The Germans meanwhile proceeded methodically to make a last and supreme requisition, although they knew the town could not satisfy it.

Towards 6 o'clock the bugle sounded, and officers lodging in private houses left at once with arms and luggage. At the same time thousands of additional soldiers, with numerous field-pieces and cannon, marched into the town

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centuries of European history be destroyed because of the acts of a few patriots acting under the impulse of terror or indignation?

to their allotted positions. The gas factory, which had been idle, had been worked through the previous night and day by Germans, so that during this premeditated outrage the people could not take advantage of darkness to escape from the town. A further fact that proves their premeditation is that the attack took place at 8 o'clock, the exact time at which the population entered their houses in conformity with the German orders—consequently escape became well-nigh impossible. At 8.20 a full fusillade with the roar of the cannons came from all sides of the town at once.

The sky at the same time was lit up with the sinister light of fires from all quarters. The cavalry charged through the streets sabring fugitives, while the infantry, posted on the footpaths, had their fingers on the triggers of their guns waiting for the unfortunate people to rush from the houses or appear at the windows, the soldiers complimenting each other on their marksmanship as they fired at the unhappy fugitives.

Those whose homes were not yet destroyed were ordered to quit and follow the soldiers to the railway station. There the men were separated from mothers, wives, and children, and thrown, some bound, into trains leaving in the direction of Germany.

I cannot but feel that, following the system they have inaugurated in this campaign, the Germans will use these non-combatant prisoners as human shields when they are fighting the Allies. The cruelty of these madmen surpasses all limits. They shot numbers of absolutely inoffensive people, forcing those who survived to bury their dead in the square, already encumbered with corpses whose positions suggested that they had fallen with arms uplifted in token of surrender.

As I said, the whole truth cannot yet be revealed. It is difficult to disentangle the facts even from ocular witnesses, from terrorized victims who were present at the ghastly crime. I have cross-examined some of those witnesses. I have read private letters from my cousin, Professor Albert Nerincx, at present Acting-

Others who have been allowed to live were driven past approving drunken officers by the brutal use of rifle butts, and while they were being maltreated they saw their carefully collected art and other treasures being shared out by the soldiers, the officers looking on. Those who attempted to appeal to their tormentors' better feelings were immediately shot. A few were let loose, but most of them were sent to Germany.

On Wednesday at daybreak the remaining women and children were driven out of the town—a lamentable spectacle—with uplifted arms and under the menace of bayonets and revolvers.

The day was practically calm. The destruction of the most beautiful part of the town seemed to have momentarily soothed the barbarian rage of the invaders.

On the Thursday the remnant of the Civil Guard was called up on the pretext of extinguishing the conflagration ; those who demurred were chained and sent with some wounded Germans to the Fatherland. The population had to quit at a moment's notice before the final destruction.

Then, to complete their devastation, the German hordes fell back on the surrounding villages to burn them. They tracked down the men—some were shot, some made prisoners—and during many long hours they tortured the helpless women and children. This country of Eastern Brabant, so rich, so fertile, and so beautiful, is to-day a deserted charnel-house.

Burgomaster of Louvain, who assumed office when the civic authorities had left, and whose heroic conduct is one of the few bright spots in the tragedy. Comparing and collating all the evidence at our disposal, we may take the following version given by the Belgian Commission of Inquiry as substantially correct :

“On Tuesday evening a German corps, after receiving a check, withdrew in disorder into the town of Louvain. A German guard at the entrance of the town mistook the nature of this incursion and fired on their routed fellow-countrymen, mistaking them for Belgians.

“In spite of all denials from the authorities the Germans, in order to cover their mistake, pretended that it was the inhabitants who had fired on them, whereas the inhabitants, including the police, had been disarmed more than a week ago.

“Without inquiry, and without listening to any protests, the German Commander-in-Chief announced that the town would be immediately destroyed. The inhabitants were ordered to leave their dwellings; a party of men were made prisoners and the women and children put into trains the destination of which is

unknown. Soldiers furnished with bombs set fire to all parts of the town.”

An Oxford student who visited the scene of the disaster with Mr. Henry Fürst, of Exeter College, Oxford, on August 29, gives the following description of the awful picture :

“ Burning houses were every moment falling into the roads ; shooting was still going on. The dead and dying, burnt and burning, lay on all sides. Over some the Germans had placed sacks. I saw about half a dozen women and children. In one street I saw two little children walking hand in hand over the bodies of dead men. I have no words to describe these things. I hope people will not make too much of the saving of the Hôtel de Ville.

“ The Hôtel de Ville was standing on Friday morning last, and, as we plainly saw, every effort was being made to save it from the flames. We were told by German officers that it was not to be destroyed. I have personally no doubt that it is still standing. The German officers dashing about the streets in fine motor-cars made a wonderful sight. They were well-dressed, shaven, and contented-looking ; they might have been assisting at a fashionable race-

meeting. The soldiers were looting everywhere ; champagne, wines, boots, cigars—everything was being carried off."

But let it not be thought that Louvain was destroyed in vain. To the Belgian people it has meant more than a glorious victory. To the Germans it has been more disastrous than the most ignominious defeat. Until Louvain neutral peoples might still hesitate in their sympathies. Pacifists might still waver as to the justice of the cause. After Louvain any hesitation or doubt became impossible. The destruction of Louvain was needed to drive home the meaning of German culture. The crime of Louvain branded the German rulers and the commanders of the German armies as the enemies of the human race.

## CHAPTER XIV

### GERMAN ATROCITIES IN BELGIUM

#### I

THE atrocities committed by the German armies have roused the indignation of both hemispheres. They have placed Germany outside the pale of civilization. They have covered the German armies with eternal infamy. In the full light of the twentieth century the German terror has outdone the deeds and wiped out the memory of the Spanish terror. We make ample allowances for wild rumours bred of panic, although in the present instance the panic caused by the mere approach of the German soldiery is in itself a most significant symptom. If the German armies had observed the laws of civilized warfare which protect the defenceless inhabitants, there would have been no need for the population to fly for their lives, and there would not be at present a million homeless exiles wandering over the high roads of Holland. We also make

ample allowances for the hallucinations produced by the war fever and for the consequent difficulty in sifting the facts. But the evidence which has been forthcoming does not depend on hearsay or on the utterances of uneducated people. We have the concurrent and circumstantial evidence of thousands of reliable and educated witnesses. Such evidence cannot be controverted, and that evidence proves that the Germans violated every clause of the Hague Convention.

By Article XXIII it was especially forbidden "to kill or wound an enemy who, having laid down his arms, or having no longer means of defence, has surrendered at discretion."

Again and again the German soldiery have killed enemies that surrendered.

By the same Article it was forbidden "to destroy or seize the enemy's property, unless such destruction or seizure be imperatively demanded by the necessities of war."

Again and again the German armies have destroyed villages and towns and seized property and looted banks and public offices.

Article XXV stipulates: "The attack or bombardment, by whatever means, of towns,

villages, dwellings, or buildings which are undefended, is prohibited."

Again and again the German armies have bombarded undefended cities like Malines and Alost.

Article XXVI stipulates : "The officer in command of an attacking force must, before commencing a bombardment, except in cases of assault, do all in his power to warn the authority."

The German armies have bombarded Antwerp in the dead of night without any previous warning.

Article XXVII of the Hague Convention stipulates : "In sieges and bombardments all necessary steps must be taken to spare as far as possible buildings dedicated to religion, art, science, or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals, and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not being used at the time for military purposes. It is the duty of the besieged to indicate the presence of such buildings or places by distinctive and visible signs which shall be notified to the enemy beforehand."

The German soldiers, apostles of German culture, have systematically destroyed at Lou-

vain, Malines, and Antwerp monuments sacred to art and religion, and which had become the common inheritance of humanity.

As atrocities innumerable were committed from the very beginning of hostilities, the Belgian Government, realizing the need of an immediate judicial investigation before military events might make it impossible to ascertain the truth, appointed a Commission with the object of collecting and sifting evidence wherever possible from ocular witnesses, and wherever possible on the spot. Some of the evidence collected by that Commission has already been published. Its conclusions were so appalling, so staggering, that the Belgian Government took steps at once to try to stop the wholesale slaughter of a defenceless population by appealing to the public opinion of the neutral States, and especially to that of the United States of America. A special Commission composed of the Belgian Minister of Justice and of three Secretaries of State was sent to Washington to put the whole case before the American Government and the American people.

## II

If was apparent from the outset that the campaign was going to be conducted by the Germans regardless of the laws of civilized warfare.

As we pointed out in a previous chapter, a few inhabitants of Visé, familiar with the use of weapons and unfamiliar with the usages of warfare, fired on the German troops, infuriated either by the German invasion or by the excesses of the German soldiery. Generalizing from a few such isolated cases, the Germans have described the whole district of Liége as a region of "francs-tireurs." They have spread the myth that the Belgians made it a regular practice to fire from the tops of houses and from behind hedges, and to shoot down German troops. And from the outset the Germans made the whole population responsible for the actions of every civilian.

It is certain that there have been isolated cases of hostile acts committed by civilians, but when a burglar enters your house in the dead of night you instinctively try to defend yourself. You do not wait until you have

called in the police. To the unsophisticated Walloon peasant the brutal aggression of the Teuton without cause or provocation appeared as an act of burglary. But whatever may be the explanation or justification of isolated acts committed by the peasants or artisans, it is obvious that such acts can only have occurred at the beginning of the war, and that the Belgians must have learnt their lesson very soon. It is inconceivable that Belgian civilians, knowing that any hostile act on their part would be met by instant retaliation, should have brought down upon themselves and the people the implacable vengeance of the conqueror. In establishing the responsibility for German atrocities, it may therefore be safely left to the reader whether we ought to accept the evidence of the murderers or that of their victims.

### III

It might be desirable, though it would be difficult, to distinguish between the atrocities perpetrated by individual soldiers acting under the influence of hunger or drink, of lust or greed, and atrocities perpetrated with the connivance or complicity of the authorities.

The barbarities perpetrated are innumerable, and their enumeration would be sickening reading. We must content ourselves with giving in the Appendix a few typical extracts from the Belgian Government Report. The German soldiers got out of hand. They raided and looted indiscriminately. They committed every crime which it is possible for human brutality to commit. They mutilated and tortured soldiers. They ill - treated children. They violated women. They used peasants as a human shield to protect them against the fire of the Belgian troops. Every war correspondent will be able to supply cases from his personal observation.\*

## IV

I HAVE called those deeds perpetrated by drunken soldiers individual acts, but it is really impossible to draw the line. My contention is that it is not the famished or drunken German

\* The British Papers have published the evidence of Mr. Powell, war correspondent of the *New York World*, a careful and impartial observer, who accompanied me in my car to the battlefield of Malines. It was whilst with Mr. Powell that I saw the mutilated bodies of the farmers of Sempst referred to on p. 145.

wretches who are ultimately responsible, it is the authorities themselves. The German army is the most disciplined army in the world ; and if the authorities had chosen to give the word of command, the excesses would have been stopped. Once the authorities permitted looting, once they adopted themselves the practices of predatory warfare, they must be held responsible for all the consequences that must necessarily ensue. Once they permitted looting, they became responsible for every excess which must needs result from looting. Once the officers were allowed to help themselves to the champagne cellars of the Belgian nobility, they could not prevent the common soldier from getting drunk on gin or Burgundy. Once the authorities allowed a private to rob a woman of her jewels, they must be held responsible if the soldier also robbed her of her honour.

## V

BUT in truth it is mere waste of time to discuss evidence or to allot responsibilities. The German military authorities have made no secret of their policy. There has been the most de-

liberate method in their madness. They admit themselves that they had acted systematically. They have practised ruthless severity as a means of terrorizing the people, of compelling submission, and of finishing the war to their advantage. They have followed the advice of Bismarck, of leaving their enemies nothing but their eyes to weep with. But even if we did not have their own admission, their evil deeds would still speak for themselves. Namur, Dinant, Malines, and Louvain, Visé, Termonde, Alost, and Bilsen, were not destroyed by individuals, but by superior authority of the Kaiser. The crimes of that superior authority cry aloud for vengeance and retribution.

Nor is it any palliation of their deeds to say that there are several Belgian towns where the German armies committed no excesses. In the first place, it is not true to say that they did not commit any excesses. Everywhere, even in Liége and Brussels, their conduct was abominable. They despoiled the inhabitants. They famished the population. They revived the barbarous usage of taking hostages. They robbed private banks. If they have committed fewer crimes in the great centres of population,

it is partly because in those towns they were to some extent standing on their good behaviour. They could not do in Brussels what they did in Louvain, they could not have provoked a large population when they themselves only disposed of a few thousands which at any moment might be weakened or recalled. If the Germans had treated the 700,000 inhabitants of Brussels as they treated the 5000 townsmen of Visé or the 8000 inhabitants of Aerschot, retribution would not have been slow to follow. These modern representatives of culture and chivalry may not have been afraid to exterminate the defenceless inhabitants of villages. But they had no desire to wage a war of extermination in large centres. They knew only too well that in case of a general rising it would not be the conquered but the conquerors who would be exterminated.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE SIEGE OF ANTWERP

#### I

**W**HEN General Brialmont succeeded, after a determined opposition on the part of the Belgian Government, in carrying out his ambitious engineering scheme, and when the old system of a walled *enceinte* was replaced by a system of isolated forts, it was assumed that the new fortified position of Antwerp was to be the pivot of national defence. It was assumed that within the two concentric circles of fortresses a Belgian army could hold out for two years, and that the position was practically impregnable. It was assumed, therefore, that the whole history of any future Belgian campaign would be limited to two chapters. It would begin with Liège and it would end with Antwerp. The Belgian Army, having held back the invader on the Meuse, was to withdraw to the entrenched camp on the Scheldt, which was to be both the headquarters of the Government and the base of the Army.

Alas! the stronghold supposed to be im-

pregnable was taken after a siege of eleven days, and the main part of Brialmont's prophecy has been contradicted by the event. On the other hand, almost up to the last his main plan of campaign was carried out. No doubt there have been more than the two chapters of Liége and Antwerp. There have been many other episodes, heroic and tragic. But notwithstanding appalling sacrifices, notwithstanding a guerilla warfare which can only be compared with the warfare of the Peninsular campaign, the Belgian Army had to retreat to Antwerp. Less than three weeks after the beginning of the war the King, the Government, and the Diplomatic Corps had to make their headquarters in the ancient Flemish city.

## II

THE history of Antwerp is a paradox. Her commanding position on the Scheldt gave her a contradictory mission. Geographical conditions made her a commercial centre given up to peaceful pursuits. But the same conditions predestined her also to be a military stronghold. That divided function has appeared through all her chequered history. Again and

again commerce had to reconstruct what war and politics had destroyed. Again and again Antwerp was besieged by invading hosts. In the fourteenth century, after the closing of the Zwyn, Antwerp succeeded to the prosperity of Bruges. She reached her zenith under the Dukes of Burgundy. Under Charles Quint she fell a victim to the wars of religion. In 1576 Spanish soldiers looted the city and 8000 citizens were massacred. In 1585 she sustained one of the most memorable sieges in history, immortalized in the pages of Motley. But even the Spanish terror would not have permanently arrested the prosperity of the Flemish metropolis, and twenty-five years after the Spanish terror Antwerp saw the golden age of Rubens and Van Dyck. It was not war, but diplomacy, which dealt the death-blow to the greatness of Antwerp, for it was diplomacy which, at the behest of the Dutch Republic, closed the Scheldt to commerce in 1648. Rotterdam and Amsterdam had for generations envied the wealth of their rival, and by the Treaty of Westphalia they obtained that the Scheldt should be closed to international commerce. For more than two centuries that iniquitous measure was main-

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tained, and was only repealed in 1863. In vain did Napoleon, who saw in Antwerp a pistol aimed at England, try his utmost to restore the former greatness of Antwerp. That greatness was dependent on trade, and trade was impossible as long as the Scheldt was closed.

The modern prosperity of Antwerp, therefore, dates from the reopening of the Scheldt by the Treaty of 1863. Since then her commerce has grown by leaps and bounds, and on the eve of the war Antwerp had become the most flourishing port on the Continent.

In building his line of fortifications General Brialmont managed to reconcile the demands of national defence and the demands of commerce. He built his two rings of forts in such a wide circle that the city was allowed to expand freely. On the outbreak of the war fifty years of rapid growth had not yet overtaken the outer forts.

### III

I WAS in Antwerp for a fortnight immediately after the capture of Brussels. All through those critical days the greatest optimism prevailed. "La situation reste bonne": such was the

invariable formula which summed up the situation in the military bulletins. Whatever might happen elsewhere, Antwerp would certainly hold out. It may have been only official optimism with the laudable purpose of keeping up the spirits of the population and in order not to alarm public opinion. But, sincere or not, wise or unwise optimism was certainly the order of the day. Antwerp, we were told, might be invested, although this was very unlikely, as the German forces were not sufficient to invest such an immense circle. But probably Antwerp would not be besieged. Most certainly it would never be captured. It was practically "impregnable." It had become doubly "impregnable." Since the outbreak of war defences had been still further strengthened by earthworks, trenches, redoubts. Whole villages had been burnt to clear the country for the fire of the forts. Historical châteaux had been razed to the ground. Woods had been felled. Forests of barbed wire had taken the place of the green woods. Hundreds of square kilometres had been brought under water to prevent the Germans from bringing up their heavy artillery.

## IV

IT was a strange life which I was to observe from the Hôtel St. Antoine, where I was staying with the Ministers of State and the Diplomatic Body. Some of my English friends were evoking reminiscences from "Vanity Fair," and used to compare our hotel life to that of Brussels on the eve of Waterloo. The city was not yet technically beleaguered. The Belgian army made sorties every day. Individual citizens could leave at will, although under police supervision. I motored out every morning in the wake of the Belgian troops. The communications with Holland and Flanders were still open. One main railway line, that from Antwerp to Ostend via St. Nicholas and Ghent, was still going. Yet, for practical purposes, the Belgian Government in Antwerp was cut off from the outer world and could only communicate with England. A town which had grown rich through international intercourse, a city which in normal times was in touch with every corner of the globe, was practically isolated.

And that isolated city was full of contrasts.

The docks and quays were vacant. The magnificent port was deserted. Its mighty life had come to a complete standstill. Only a few ships were held up where a month before the docks were crowded with the argosies of four continents. The spacious boulevards were desolate. A thousand German merchant princes, whose insolent luxury had asserted the wealth and power of the "Vaterland," had left the city whose hospitality they had so shamefully abused. There were few motors or carriages in the streets, for nearly all had been commandeered by the military authorities. There was little outward display of wealth, for most of the rich people had fled from the country, and the few who had remained had little inclination to spend.

Yet in other quarters of the city there was intense animation. The population had nearly doubled owing to the presence of a big field army, of the Government officials, owing also to the influx of tens of thousands of refugees. That outside population was mainly living in the streets. Most offices and banks were closed. Half the population was idle, and the idlers would gather in the cafés or the public avenues

to discuss the latest sensation. Newsvendors at every hour of the day and night were hawking their newspapers, which contained no news. Life was especially animated round the Place de Meir, in the neighbourhood of the King's palace, of the Government offices, and of the military headquarters. Motors were going to and fro. Orderlies were taking messages.

Poverty did not obtrude itself. Where there was so much acute suffering, where many private residences were being turned into hospitals, one had hardly time to think of the slums. No one thought of the poor where everybody was reduced to poverty, except the very richest. But if the poverty of the slums did not obtrude itself, it was there all the same, and one felt its darkening shadow. One thought of the thousands of clerks, of the tens of thousands of dockers all thrown out of work. One looked at the staring, vacant crowds and one wondered what the approaching winter was going to bring in misery and starvation.

In the evening a weird transformation scene suddenly changed the aspect of the city. For fear of the Zeppelins, all lights were turned out, and the city was wrapped in darkness. People

would still crowd the streets, but they had to grope their way, and the silent and shadowy figures, moving through the murky streets, produced a most uncanny impression. No other aspect of the city drove home more forcibly the horrors of the present war, nor enabled one better to realize how the war had altered all the conditions of normal life.

## V

THERE was still plenty of excitement in Antwerp. And perhaps it was as well that there should still remain something to distract public attention from the anxieties of the moment, and to relieve the dreary monotony of everyday life. There was the excitement produced by the arrival of German prisoners, who were brought to headquarters at every hour of the day. There were the convoys of the wounded. There were the daily arrivals and departures of the armoured motor-cars. There was the departure of the troops, a departure which took place without any of the pomp and circumstance of war. After five weeks one did not hear the sound of military music. Belgian soldiers did not need to be

stirred by the strains of martial airs to do their duty to their country.

By far the most dramatic incident which happened during those early weeks was the first raid of the Zeppelin monster. As I wrote my impressions on the spot and immediately after the disaster, I can do no better than merely repeat the account which I gave of the impressions produced by that historical raid :

“ANTWERP, August 25.

“I have just lived through the most tragic night of the war.

“For the first time in history a great civilized community has been bombarded from the sky in the darkness of night. Count Zeppelin, whom the Kaiser has called the greatest genius of the century, has performed the greatest exploit of his life. He may well be proud of his achievement. He has mangled and slaughtered non-belligerents, men, women, and children. He has thrown bombs on hospitals where the Belgians were tending German wounded. He has staggered humanity.

“On August 5 the German commander warned General Leman at Liége that if the

forts did not surrender, the Zeppelin fleet would move at once. The forts of Liége did not surrender, and the Germans have been as good as their word. They have surpassed themselves in the art of striking terror, and they have placed themselves outside the pale of humanity.

"I was awakened at 1 o'clock this morning by a frightful cannonade. A Zeppelin had been sighted about 700 feet above the town. I at once went out into the streets, and for eleven hours—from one hour after midnight until noon—I have scarcely left the scene of the catastrophe.

"I have explored every one of the devastated streets. So far I have found ten bombs in ten different streets. It is impossible as yet to get accurate statistics. In my calculation there are about 900 houses slightly damaged, and about sixty houses nearly destroyed.

"The number of victims is unknown. In a single house I found four dead. One room was a chamber of horrors, the remains of the mangled bodies being scattered in every direction. In the house opposite a husband and wife, whose only son had just died in battle, were killed—a whole family wiped out.

"The street where the tragedy happened surpasses in horror anything I have ever seen.

"I brought the King's secretary with me. It is significant that the Zeppelin bombs were all aimed at public buildings, at the barracks, at the Government offices, and especially at the Royal palace.

"I was given by the King's secretary two fragments of a bomb that had been found a few yards from the palace."

## VI

ALMOST immediately after the capture of Brussels Antwerp became the centre of national defence. It did not confine itself to being the last refuge of Belgian independence. It became the base of a new Belgian offensive. Every morning the Belgian army would make its sorties, generally in the direction of Louvain or Brussels, harassing the German troops. Every evening my friend, M. Hanhart, the young ironclad hero, would bring his haul of prisoners. As a rule, those operations partook of the nature of guerilla warfare. There were many partial engagements. The only pitched battle, which I have described in a previous chapter,

involving about 150,000 men, was fought at Malines. But encounters took place every day, sometimes at two or three different points. Almost invariably the Belgians were successful in driving back the German forces and in checking the German advance.

They succeeded too well. If the Belgians had been less successful in their offensive, if they had been less energetic, the Germans would have remained content with guarding their lines of communication. But as the fortunes of war turned against the Germans in France, as the retreat from France to Belgium became every day a probable contingency, the Germans could not allow a formidable foe to remain on their line of retreat, a foe who at any moment might cut off their communications with Germany. In that sense it may be truly said that the fate of Antwerp was decided on the Aisne and on the Oise. As the battle of the Rivers dragged on week after week, and as the Germans were slowly losing ground, the capture of Antwerp became a vital necessity. The Germans knew that the Flemish capital had to be taken. They also knew that if they were prepared to pay the cost, it *could b* taken

The Germans paid the cost, and the last stronghold of Belgium fell to the enemy after one of the briefest and one of the most dramatic sieges in world history.

## VII

THE end came suddenly. As the retreat of the German armies from France became an impending probability, it was decided to strike a decisive blow at the commercial capital of Belgium. Heavy artillery was brought up from Maubeuge. The whole fleet of Zeppelins was mobilized, and on the 26th the siege of Antwerp began.

Attacks were started simultaneously on the southern line against the Fort of Waelhem, and on the eastern line against the Forts of Lierre. Again and again the Germans were repulsed. The defence of Waelhem, which the Belgians held for three days in the face of furious assaults, is one of the heroic episodes of the war. But it was proved once again that even the most modern forts could not hold out against the new artillery. Nor was the Belgian garrison large enough both to defend the wide perimeter of the Antwerp position and to make

continuous sorties. On the 5th the two forts of Lierre were silenced and the Belgians had to retreat behind the Nethe. The whole fate of Antwerp depended on whether the enemy would be able to cross the little river. The Germans tried to throw pontoon-bridges. They were repeatedly repulsed with heavy losses by the Belgians and by the British Marines, who had appeared at the last moment in response to an urgent appeal of the Belgian Government. By the evening of the 5th the Belgians had to retire, and the enemy was able to cross the river and to establish himself between the inner and the outer forts. From that moment the bombardment of the city became possible.

It began on the 7th. The Germans disposed of two hundred guns, many of them being 42 cm. howitzers. An uninterrupted hail of shells was poured on the city. The invaders had solemnly promised to respect the historical monuments. They did not keep their pledge. Before the end of the first day of the bombardment bombs exploded in the Place Verte in front of the Cathedral. The Palais de Justice was burned to the ground. Part of the city was in flames. The population fled in a

panic ; thousands kept in hiding in cellars. Half a million escaped into Holland. On Saturday and Sunday the stream of refugees which spread over Holland, France, and the United Kingdom had reached as far north as Edinburgh. On both days, from 7 in the morning, refugees were arriving at my house in the Belgian Consulate.

The terrifying effect of the bombardment by the heavy guns was still further intensified by the bombardment from the air. Six Zeppelins hovered above the hapless city. When I remember the nerve-shattering effect of one single Zeppelin monster, I can realize what the bombardment by a whole fleet must have been to a panic-stricken population, whilst the town was being simultaneously attacked on all sides from the forts.

The end could not be delayed. Armchair critics have expressed astonishment at the rapid surrender of a city which was supposed to be impregnable. The wonder is not that Antwerp should have surrendered. The wonder is rather that it should have held out for eleven days. I had been pessimistic from the first as to the fate which would befall Antwerp. The recent

experiences of Liége, Namur, and Maubeuge could leave one in no doubt as to the final issue. If the war has driven home one certain truth, it is this, that no modern fortress is capable of resisting the destructive effect of the newest artillery. To have held out any longer would have led to the slaughter of the civilian population, to the complete destruction of one of the finest cities of the world, and, last but not least, to the capitulation of the Belgian army.

## VIII

IT has been asserted with wearisome iteration that the capture of Antwerp was only a futile vengeance wreaked on the unfortunate Belgians, and that the occupation of the metropolis on the Scheldt could have no possible effect on the future campaign. The Allies have been too much inclined to believe that whatever disaster happened in Belgium would have but little effect on the general situation. No assumption could be further from the truth. The capture of Antwerp will give the German army a formidable base of operations. When they fall back on Belgium, as they certainly will, they will be in possession of a line of defence

of four big cities, of which three at least are first-class fortresses. Entrenched behind these fortresses, the Germans will have their lines of communication assured, and they will receive their supplies without any difficulty or delay. The possession of Antwerp is therefore certain to make the work of the Allies very much more difficult and to protract the duration of the war. Its effect certainly ought to be to decide Great Britain to strain every effort to throw all her available strength into Belgium at the very earliest moment.

And whatever the possession of Antwerp may mean to the Allies, to Belgium it opens a new era of suffering. A leader-writer in the *Times* remarked that "the bombardment and the surrender of Antwerp is the culmination and the conclusion of Belgian agony." Alas! it is only the beginning. The worst is still to come. Before a few weeks are over, three million soldiers will again invade the country and trample Belgian fields, live on a starving nation, and destroy what still remains of what was only three months ago the richest and most prosperous country in the world, and what is now a scene of universal desolation.

## CHAPTER XVI AFTER ANTWERP

### I

THE capture of Antwerp is the culminating point of the Belgian tragedy. But the end has not come yet, nor the beginning of the end. The Belgian Government retired to Le Havre, and maintained the continuity of the machinery of government with the fiction of exterioriality. The main Belgian army retired to the coast and to the extreme corner of West Flanders under the leadership of the "Hero-King." The Belgian army, which after two months of ceaseless fighting had earned the right to take a rest, instead claimed the right of marching into the line of battle. Ever since the Belgian troops have borne the brunt of the fighting on the Yser, helping the Allies in holding back the German advance and barring the way to Calais. In the words of Mr. Gibbs : "The Belgian resistance on the banks of the Yser is one of the heroic things of all history." The Belgian army lost 15,000 out of 40,000 in killed and wounded.

During all those deadly days the Germans continued their work of vandalism. One after another the beautiful coast towns, once the favourite resorts of the German middle classes—Middelkorke, Westende, Nieuport—fell a prey to the flames. The inland Flemish cities, Dixmude and Roulers, were totally wiped out. In Roulers alone a thousand civilians were killed in the streets or whilst taking refuge in underground cellars.

## II

THE appalling destruction achieved within the last few days is only an indication of what is certain to follow in the near future. In this connexion let us be under no delusion. In proportion as the Belgian resistance is more heroic, in proportion as the Allies succeed in driving back the Germans, the Belgian people themselves are bound to suffer more. The worst is still before us. Each victory of the Allies will have to be paid for by additional sufferings on the part of the Belgians. Before the end of November the whole of Belgium will probably be transformed into one huge military camp occupied in the north and east by

2,000,000 of Germans and in the south and west by 2,000,000 of Allied armies. The Germans will make a desperate stand. They know too much of the horrors of war not to strive their utmost to keep their own country clear of the enemy. They will be entrenched behind a formidable ring of fortresses. They will have to be bombarded out of Antwerp, Namur, and Liége. They will even have to be bombarded out of Brussels, for even Brussels has become a fortified city. Guns will be mounted upon the Cathedral of Sainte Gudule. The most beautiful church of Belgium, the most perfect town hall of Europe, will share the fate of the Cathedral of Reims and of the belfry of Arras, and the fate of Brussels is most probably to be the fate of all the remaining cities of Belgium.

Once again I recall the words of King Albert to me in Antwerp : "When victory comes to our armies, what will remain of hapless Belgium ? "

### III

BELGIUM will have lost everything. The material damage, the destruction of thousands

of cities and villages, the total collapse of industry and trade, are incalculable. The damage to the monuments, sacred to Art and Religion, is not only incalculable, but irreparable. The sufferings inflicted upon millions of people baffles imagination, but the moral and spiritual gain is equally inestimable. Belgium will have proved to all the world her determination and her right to exist as a free nation. She will have earned the sympathy and admiration of the whole world. She will have left an inspiring example to posterity. She has lost everything, but she has saved her own soul, and she has saved the liberties of Europe.

#### IV

AND, therefore, from the crumbling ruins, from the ruins and the ashes of the Belgium of to-day, a new and nobler Belgium will arise. The new Belgium will not be greater in territory, it is unlikely that Belgium will receive much accession of territory. There may be some rectification of boundaries in the Belgian Congo. The African colony may be made secure against any future encroachments of the German enemy. The mouth of the Scheldt

may be declared either neutral or Belgian water, with due compensation to Holland, but Belgium will remain a small country ; but if she remains a small country she will become by unanimous consent a great nation, great from the conscience of her duty, nobly performed, of sufferings heroically borne, from an unshaken confidence in the future, strong with the strength tested in a score of battlefields, with unshaken confidence in the future.

And, therefore, Belgium can look forward with every confidence to the work of reconstruction. Thousands of villages are to be rebuilt. Thousands of farms have to be reconstructed and restocked. Tens of thousands of crofters will have to be assisted. But more difficult than the rebuilding of burning villages and cities will be the rebuilding of the complex fabric of trade and industry. And that fabric will have to be built mainly with British material, whereas in the past it was built mainly with German material. It is mainly with the assistance of British capital that Belgian industries will have to be reconstructed. Belgium will afford a splendid field for British enterprise. The economic motive will combine with the patriotic

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motive, to send British capital to Flanders. But stronger even than the bond of commercial interest will be the strength of the intellectual and moral bond. The study of the English language will become a compulsory subject for every Belgian school, and a new generation of Belgian schoolboys will arise taught to appreciate the literary achievements of the British race. The indelible memory of common sufferings in a sacred cause, of a chivalrous brotherhood in arms, the conscience of common political ideals, the same indomitable love of freedom, will weld the two nations together, and the British-Belgian Alliance will become a powerful factor in the future destiny of Europe.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE MARTYRDOM OF BELGIUM

I SPENT five weeks at the Belgian theatre of war as special correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle*. My nerves are still shattered and my imagination is still haunted, and will be haunted till the end of my days, by the harrowing events which in the course of those five tragic weeks followed each other with such staggering rapidity. I still see before my mind's eye emerging in a starlit sky the sinister cigar-shaped monster raining bombs on defenceless Antwerp. I see in one house of the same stricken city a chamber of horrors, where every wall was bespattered with the entrails of women and children, blown up by the Zeppelin shells. I see the dreary processions of ambulance wagons returning from the battle. I see in every town the endless vistas of hospital wards, and I still seem to hear the oppressive stillness of those wards, only broken by the groans of the sufferers. I see in the huge almshouse of Malines, down in the dark catacombs, oozing with moisture, two hundred old men and women awaiting in a

frenzy of terror the arrival of the Huns. I see from the high railway bank overlooking the battlefield of Hofstade a hailstorm of shrapnel bursting around us and setting fire to one village after another.

After three hundred and fifty years the memory still survives in the Netherlands of the "Spanish Terror." Henceforth the memory of the German Terror, the "Furor Teutonicus," will wipe out even the crimes of Alva and the Spanish Inquisition.

The Belgian campaign has assumed a character of ruthless barbarity unequalled in modern warfare. After sifting all the exaggerations, there remain countless authenticated deeds of inhuman and callous cruelty, and there are only too many obvious reasons explaining those deeds. In the first place, the Germans were taken unawares by the heroic resistance of the little Belgian army; they vented on the defenceless inhabitants their disappointment at the failure of their plans, and they tried to succeed by terrorization where they had failed by the force of arms. In the second place, the German soldiery, being quartered in the châteaux of the nobility and in the mansions

of the well-to-do burghers, and being allowed to sack their well-stocked cellars, gave themselves over to orgies of drunkenness. In the third place, the Belgian campaign almost from the beginning assumed the character of guerilla warfare, which is the most cruel and relentless form of war. Almost from the beginning the Germans, scattered in small bands and removed from the presence of their superior officers, raided territories denuded of troops, and with impunity sacked and burnt the countryside.

It is quite fitting that the British Press should have emphasized, and should continue to emphasize, the abominable crimes perpetrated by the German soldiery. The destruction of Louvain and Visé, of Malines and Namur, of Dinant and Termonde, was necessary to drive home from what kind of Teutonic culture the world will be saved by the triumph of the Allied arms. At the same time, whilst exposing to the whole world German barbarities, we ought not to divert our attention from two other evils, less sensational perhaps, but of far greater magnitude. I refer to the twin evils of starvation from unemploy-

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ment and the wholesale exodus of the Belgian people.

Other belligerent nations may suffer from unemployment. In Belgium alone there has been created a whole nation of unemployed. In other countries trade and industry are dislocated. In Belgium they have come to a complete standstill. Out of a population of eight millions, seven millions are under the heel of the invader. Railwaymen are starving, for railways have ceased work. Office clerks are starving, for banks and offices are closed. Public officials are starving, for no salaries can be paid. Journalists and printers are starving, for newspapers and books have ceased to appear. Mill-hands and coal-miners and ironworkers are starving, for mills and coal-mines and ironworks are closed. It is true that the Germans have reopened the gigantic works of Cockerill, and have even offered the Belgian ironworkers an increase of wages of 50 per cent. But I doubt whether the 15,000 ironworkers of Cockerill will be induced by this diabolical bribe to manufacture the German guns which will mow down their Belgian brethren.

The appalling evil of complete commercial

and industrial paralysis, culminating in starvation, is still further intensified by the wholesale emigration of the people. This phenomenon of the Belgian refugees is unique in the history of modern warfare. Wherever the German Uhlan has appeared he has created a desert. It is literally true to say that a whole people have taken to the road. Day after day, in every direction, mile after mile, I met those melancholy processions of fugitives of every age, of every class—whole families huddled up in carts, old women and infants trundled in wheelbarrows. Because the Germans have reverted to the barbaric stage, the unfortunate Belgians have had to revert to the nomadic stage. But, alas ! there is this difference between the nomadic Belgians and their ancestors, that their ancestors were the shepherds, whilst the Belgians are the sheep driven at the mercy of a relentless foe.

What adds to the tragedy of this exodus of a nation is the fact that those vagrant processions are formed of the most sedentary population in the world. The Flemish peasants are rooted in their native soil. Most of them had never looked beyond the horizon of their village. A sudden cataclysm has driven hundreds of

thousands into strange lands homeless and penniless. I doubt whether in human history there has ever been such universal and acute suffering concentrated in so narrow an area, condensed in so short a time. I know full well the sublime meaning and purpose of all this suffering. I know that the Belgian nation will emerge purified and ennobled and redeemed from her awful ordeal. But at what a price has redemption been secured ! And what will be the aftermath of anguish and agony ?

I have tried to give a picture of the present distress of Belgium. So far from being exaggerated, it is only a feeble attempt to describe infinite and unutterable misery. The misery is almost beyond human help. Yet a great deal can be done to alleviate the sufferings of a martyred nation. A great deal has been done already. A great deal more requires to be done. And let us not discriminate in our charity to the British and in our charity to the Belgians. The Belgians have fought, they are still fighting, the battles of Great Britain. If there be priority, let priority be given to those who were first in suffering,

and who are suffering most. If the British people and the British Government are not going to help, I ask, who, then, will help? As long as German occupation lasts there is no Belgian Government to appeal to. Until the Teutonic invader is expelled from Belgian territory the Belgian people are under the sole protection and dependent on the generosity of their British brethren.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE PROBLEM OF THE BELGIAN REFUGEES

#### I

WE are only gradually realizing the fact that a whole nation has been uprooted from its native soil and been driven from its homes by terror and hunger. The bulk of the Belgian refugees has fled to Holland. About half a million are camped in the Province of Zeeland alone. About 200,000 have crossed the Channel. Many more hundreds of thousands are likely to come to England when the thickly populated industrial districts in the south of Belgium will be in the grip of famine. The presence of such huge multitudes will be a severe drain at a time when there are so many calls on British generosity. It will be an even more severe strain on British statesmanship, for the management of numerous Belgian colonies raises many delicate questions of trade competition and labour adjustment and organization.

## II

THE solutions hitherto adopted or proposed under the first impulse of generosity are obviously only temporary makeshifts. Tens of thousands of Belgians have already been herded in public buildings. Those barracks have supplied an immediate emergency and have provided a welcome shelter. But those impoverished Socialist republics, where all distinctions of class are abolished, where master and servant, coal-miner and coal-owner, slum-dwellers and delicately nurtured ladies are crowded together, cannot be a final solution.

On the other hand, thousands of British homes have offered to take in individual Belgians. I have on my desk a thousand such offers of private hospitality. The kind-hearted people who make those offers forget that in Belgium, as elsewhere, the social unit is the family ; that Belgian families are rather larger than in other countries, and that in exile families cling together even more fondly than in ordinary circumstances. Therefore such individual separatist hospitality which would break up Belgian families cannot be a definite solution.

I would go further. Even where British families would be prepared to take into their homes whole Belgian families, even such large-hearted hospitality would not be a satisfactory solution. We are apt to forget that, although the Belgians and the British live in close geographical proximity, the two people are really very different in habits of life as well as in language and religion. To take only as an illustration one or two trivial details of daily existence: the Belgian is an early riser, taking breakfast in the winter about half-past six or seven o'clock in the morning. He takes his chief meal in the middle of the day, and his diet is very different from that of the British. A glass of beer is as necessary to his happiness as a cup of tea to the Englishman. These things may only refer to the facts of material life, but, after all, it is of such domestic facts that the life of the home is made.

### III

BUT, in real truth, the main problem is not economic. It is moral. The only satisfactory hospitality will be one which will restore to the Belgian refugee the atmosphere of the home. A

refugee could do without comforts. He must needs get accustomed to hardships, but he will desire all the more passionately those essential characteristics of all home life, namely, privacy and intimacy, seclusion and independence. He will prefer the most primitive cottage where he is his own master to the most luxurious mansion where he is only an invited guest.

So far as accommodation is concerned, the simplest solution will therefore be to find a sufficient number of unoccupied cottages in every part of England, and to find the necessary financial resources to pay both rent and board to the occupants of such cottages. The next best solution will be to find accommodation in public buildings, and so to distribute the occupants that they may still maintain their personality and privacy, and that they shall not be compelled to realize the ideal of the collectivist community.

#### IV

To give work to the Belgian refugees will be even more important than to give them food, clothing, or shelter. In a recent interview which King Albert granted to a representative of the

*Daily Telegraph* His Majesty deprecated the pauperizing of his subjects. And certainly it would be a demoralizing and unprofitable kind of hospitality which would keep hundreds of thousands of Belgians for the whole winter or a whole year in compulsory idleness. Belgian pride could not bear thus to live on the charity of the British people.

I quite realize the difficulty of providing work for such large numbers. I quite see the danger of displacing British labour. The danger is all the greater because wages are lower in Belgium than in Britain, and Belgians in distress might be only too easily tempted to accept any remuneration. Still, both dangers can easily be met. After all, they are both successfully dealt with in every new country where new labour is constantly coming in.

A minimum wage can more easily be fixed for Belgian labour than for British labour because it can be fixed by authority and without fear of party complications. Nor ought it to be difficult to find labour for Belgian refugees in trades which have been temporarily depleted by recruiting. Only yesterday I received a visit from a distinguished Scottish manufacturer who

was anxious to engage skilled Belgian labour. A large proportion of his workmen had left for the Army, and unless he could replace the vacant ranks, he would have to close his mill. He had been informed that among the Belgian refugees there were plenty of highly skilled workers who could for the time being take the place of the British. It is obvious that, in this case, not only would the Belgians not displace British labour, but they would indirectly be the means of keeping British labour employed.

## V

THERE are a number of other occupations which would give profitable employment to Belgian labour. There are the many forms of intensive agriculture where Belgian people have secured an undisputed pre-eminence. The Belgian crofter has been a pioneer in market gardening and in horticulture, in poultry farming and in dairy farming. I have talked to many a landowner and to many an employer of labour. Their unanimous opinion seems to be that it would be quite easy to provide both the necessary land and the necessary capital for small Belgian colonies to settle in depopulated

and fertile agricultural districts, such as the Scottish borders. Such colonies might open new fields of agricultural enterprise, and might assist in that revival of agriculture which, after the war, will be one of the main concerns of the British Government.

## VI

AFTER the problem of employment for the grown-up Belgian labourer, there remains the problem of the education for the young. Thousands of Belgian children will be drafted into the schools of Britain. And here I would specially draw attention to the enormous practical importance of teaching the English language to those Belgian children. The teaching of English has hitherto been sadly neglected in the schools of Belgium. Many years ago I was specially invited by His Majesty King Leopold of Belgium to assist in the organizing of the teaching of English in Belgian schools. But, for commercial, as well as for political, reasons, it was found impossible to dethrone the study of the German language from its position of pre-eminence. This difficulty has now vanished. Now is the opportunity of giving a decisive

emphasis to that part of Belgian education. Belgium and Great Britain will be drawn more and more closely together in the peaceful intercourse of commerce. Let this country, then, take advantage of the presence of these thousands of Belgian children and ground them in a knowledge of English. It is in the power of the British educational authorities to train the rank and file of the commercial army which in the near future will have to organize British trade in Belgium.

## VII

EVEN if the Old Country cannot absorb and utilize such vast multitudes, the British Colonies still remain to welcome the Belgian refugees. Why should not little Belgian settlements be planted in every part of the British Empire ? Canada, South Africa, and Australia are clamouring for farmers and mechanics, and there are no better farmers and mechanics than the Flemish crofters and the Walloon artisans. Surely there never was a finer opportunity given to British statesmanship to turn the very tragedy of war into a means of developing the Empire ! If the Government are equal to the opportunity

we shall see in the near future arising beyond the seas thriving Belgian communities which will commemorate to future generations the glorious days when Belgium and Britons fought and suffered together in the cause of European freedom.



## APPENDIX I

### MALINES, THE DEAD CITY

WE are being continuously told by the representatives of the official German Press that Belgian and British newspapers have exaggerated the destruction perpetrated by the German hordes. In answer to that contention we are giving the following description of the present state of Malines, which was recently published in a Jingo Berlin paper by a Jingo war correspondent, the representative of the *Berliner Tageblatt*. Before the war Malines was one of the most beautiful and one of the most thriving cathedral cities of Belgium, the ancient seat of the Cardinal-Primate. The lurid description by Herr Bender, every word of which has about it the ring of veracity, is the most terrible indictment of Germany which has hitherto appeared in any European journal :

“ *The fiercest fury of battle, the most heartrending tragedies of death, all the sorrow and suffering of*

*war, weigh less heavily upon the heart than the unearthly, leaden-grey stillness of Malines as it stands revealed to the petrified gaze.*

*“Life in the town is extinct. The city is dead. The 60,000 inhabitants have fled. The dark houses stand open. The streets are empty. This emptiness is so vast, so infinite, that one involuntarily checks the hasty step.*

*“From time to time German soldiers pass along the streets. In the Grand’ Place, the Marché aux laines, the Place d’Egmont, at the station, soldiers are at work in large groups.*

*“Inhabitants there are none. They fled to Antwerp when Malines, by the mysterious chances of war, was drawn into the centre of the artillery fire of both combatants. They left houses and rooms lying as they were, the meal spread upon the table, the cloaks hanging in the hall.*

*“There may be still twenty inhabitants in the town. There may be only ten. We cannot tell. In all I saw only five human beings—three women and two men. They were creeping through the dead city. In the greyness of the gloomy day they seemed like ghosts, like the dead risen from their tombs. A soldier on*

sentry duty told me there were only fourteen citizens left in the town. The straggling suburb of Muysen was absolutely deserted. Every front door stood wide open. A white goat stood in a room and stared at us through the dim windowpanes. In a passage of another house there hung a girl's hat with a crimson scarf. Close by was a large watchmaker's shop—a shop in which the gold and silver watches and ornaments lay untouched and orderly in the cases and on the tables. And not a soul far or near.

“Opposite the cathedral is the inn ‘In t' Gulden Vlies.’ On the tables the glasses still stand with the dregs of wine in them. Round about are bright green chairs from which the guests appear just to have risen. On the left is a large clothier's—‘Lakens en alle Kleederstoffen’—the doors wide open, the clothes on mannikins in gruesome solitude. Beside it a ‘Schoenmagazin.’ The picture is always the same. Every shop, every house with not a soul from attic to cellar. On the Dyle, which flows through the middle of the town, boats glide slowly down the stream as if guided by an invisible hand.

“A dog is sniffing round a house that a grenade

has destroyed, tearing the whole building down and turning it into a heap of ruins.

*“The emptiness and desolation of the mediæval streets are so fearful, so oppressive, that one holds one’s breath, and horror awakes within one the childish belief in the legend of the enchanted town.*

*“That which human eye never beheld, that which Hoffmann and Poe never even dreamed in their diseased imaginations, has here become reality. As by one annihilating magic stroke, the people of a great city have vanished into nothingness. They have left hearth and home, not waiting to take with them even money and valuables. They have fled in haste on their dread way of terror. In their rapid flight they left behind them no living creature but the beasts in their stalls and the birds in their cages. When no one came to feed them the beasts crept into the house to seek for food. The birds, the melodious yellow friends of man, soon fell dead from their perch.*

*“In the middle of the town the cathedral of St. Rombaud stands enthroned—a Gothic building of gigantic dimensions. The tower, a hundred metres high, forms the western*

extremity. Above, at a dizzy height, four dials fourteen metres in diameter. They are bent and riddled with shots.

“ In the church walls are seven gaping grenade holes. Roof and tower are strewn with shrapnel shots.

“ In the interior, confusion indescribable. The magnificent stained-glass windows, representing in glowing colours the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, lie shattered on the ground.

“ The richly carved altars and all the pictures have been preserved. But the space in front of the high altar was struck by a splinter from a shell. The wooden saints were hurled from their pillars. The marble of ancient bishops' graves was shattered.

“ And yet the actual damage is insignificant. At first only the utter confusion is evident. On closer inspection, the most valuable art treasures are found to have been preserved. Only the coloured splendour of the windows has been laid in the dust. Single panes and paintings on the glass can still be distinguished in all their beauty. And up above, on the clear glass of the eastern middle window, there stands out gloriously, full

of living strength, the radiant words: ‘*Soli Deo, Gloria in Æternum.*’

“Now the inhabitants will return once more to the town.

“Antwerp, their last home and refuge in dark days, has fallen. There, too, the German flag waves and flutters in the wind that blows over the Scheldt from the North Sea. The last days were too horrible. There was no water left, and the pipes only ran sparingly for an hour in the morning.

“Belgium’s last great city fell. And still the Belgians do not give up hope. They will continue to wait for their King. Meantime they have given up waiting for the English. These noble friends have delayed too long, and will delay in the future, too, when life and possessions have to be risked. For they have always found in life ‘companions in arms’—trusting men who bled for them, as Antwerp now has suffered and fallen for them.”

## APPENDIX II

### “EVERYMAN” BELGIAN RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION FUND

#### THE MARTYRDOM OF BELGIUM

*An Appeal by G. K. Chesterton*

I HOPE that a generous response will still be made to Dr. Sarolea's eloquent and renewed appeal for the Belgian Relief Fund. Dr. Sarolea has a double right to speak of the crime and tragedy in Flanders, for he has not only seen it happening, but foreseen it before it happened. In his book on “The Anglo-German Problem” he contemplated, along with many other things that have since come true, the recent violation of Belgium, though I do not suppose he contemplated its being anything so infernal as what his eyes have seen in Antwerp and along the Belgian roads. But, apart from all personal claims, there is a particular urgency and importance in the cause he pleads, and *I for one should say, with a full sense of responsibility to the many just claims on us all, that if any charity has to suffer, it ought not to be this one.*

There are certain quite unique and arresting features about the case of Belgium. To begin with, it cannot be too much considered what a daring stroke of statesmanship—far-sighted, perhaps, but of frightful courage—the King of the Belgians ventured in resisting at all. Of that statesmanship we had the whole advantage, and Belgium the whole disadvantage : she

saved France, she saved England—herself she could not save. This is not the case of a little people in Asia or Africa who have no other course but to fight or be exterminated or sold into slavery. The Belgians had another course : they could have looked the other way while the Prussians crossed their country, so to speak, with their boots off. It is quite clear that even the Prussians, at the very beginning, wished to make it easy for them : the first messages from the German diplomatists spoke of respect for independence and sovereignty ; the first soldiers from Aix and the Rhineland spoke to the natives of a mere piece of assistance among neighbours. It is true that Germany did not keep it up long. But that is the psychology ; and an exceedingly interesting psychology it is. I do not know what the word “Junker” precisely means—something like “puppy,” I imagine—but evidently what the North Prussians call an aristocrat is some sort of allotropic form of what we call a cad. Now the most sacred stamp and seal of the cad is this—that he cannot be courteous, even when he really wants to be. Even when it is his interest to smile, he only manages to sneer. A man may smile and smile and be a villain, because villains are often gentlemen—indeed, generally gentlemen. But if he be a cad as well, he does not smile and smile : he smiles—and stiffens. He is “struck so,” as the nurses say. He is the kind of man who manages to get himself disinherited by the very death-bed of his own millionaire mother, for nothing one can define, except that the very shape of his face is irreligious, and that “Amen” sticks in his throat as in Macbeth’s. He is of the sort that are kicked out of houses for their heartiness. There are people, certainly, whose conciliation is as rude as their

aggression : and they exist in public as well as private affairs.

In this sense it is true that the attempts of the Prussian to be polite have something about them monstrous and amusing, like a bear on its hind-legs. He cannot keep it up—sometimes not even to the end of a sentence. It is particularly entertaining in his appeals to neutral Powers. His utterances always end so very differently from the way in which they began. He says, in effect, to a country like Holland, “We salute your delightful dykes. Our culture contemplates your pleasing canals. Your army is under the protection of our never-to-be-broken word—and lucky for it, for one Pomeranian Grenadier could kick all your waddling regiments into the Zuyder Zee.” Having put the Dutchman at his ease, the Prussian turns, let us say, to the Switzer and says, “Schiller has written of William Tell. Hoch the William Tell ! How fortunate for that hero that he did not have to face the Krupp howitzer with his little bow and arrow ! As you are a neutral Power, it will be unnecessary to exhibit our engines for blowing up the Rigi and removing the Lake of Geneva to the Palmen Garten at Frankfort.” Leaving the Switzer in raptures, he will turn to the philosophic Dane and say, “My own old, humble, and grateful friend ! I will protect you. I protected a bit of you just before 1870 ; and I’ll protect a lot more unless you jolly well do as I tell you. Just look at this gun !” Without waiting for the delighted thanks of Denmark, he will turn to the United States and offer not to lay waste the whole of that country ; or to Italy, and explain when and why he will not hang the Pope. Then, when he finds he is not so popular as he thought, his heart will bleed, and he will say the sword is forced

into his hand, and that he “has not a friend in the wide world.” Which is probably the case.

It is true, then, that the Prussian style is apt to be awkward, even when the Prussian policy is pacific. I know nothing more characteristic than a phrase which occurred in an excellent German article, an article urging the Germans to abstain from their outrages on ecclesiastical art. It said especially that a certain mediæval building should be specially sacred because studies were made in it by some German whose name I cannot spell. I know nothing against or about the gentleman, but I think that by the time I had brought myself to act in entire contempt of the House of God and the history of Joan of Arc, the memory of the German gentleman would sit lightly on me. There is this awkwardness in their most well-meaning efforts. They seem incapable even of apologizing without bragging. But though conciliatory attitudes are a great strain on them, and are never kept up for long, that should not make us forget what it is due to Belgium to remember—that the first attitude towards Belgium was, in form, conciliatory, and was kept up just long enough to have allowed Belgium to avoid her heroic trial had she chosen. Fountains of German flattery were doubtless ready to flow for her if she had chosen to facilitate the German plan—however passively and negatively. In a sense she could still have saved her face; but she preferred to save Europe. This, it seems to me, gives her a claim on something beyond pity or even gratitude—a claim on our intellectual honour beyond anything that even suffering could extort. She had faith in our policy almost before we had one. She answered for our truth and virtue before we answered ourselves. For one awful hour she found herself alone in Europe; and yet she

answered for Europe. And she answered right. In that enormous circle of silence the first shot from Liége was the answer of Christendom. That little country, with its pattern of bright fields as tidy as a chess-board, with its medley of mediæval cities as carved and quaint as the chess-men, found somewhere in itself, and by itself, the voice that is the voice of two thousand years—

*Through me no friend shall meet his doom ;  
Here, while I live, no foe finds room.*

It may well be that in the future men may feel little Belgium as a kind of working model of Europe—as Europe is the working model of the world.

This Europe of Europe, this real casket of culture, this essence of Roman Empire, this small nation of which the very cities have been nations, this kingdom within kingdom and republic within republic of accumulated politics and history, has been suddenly turned into a desert—a desert where dwell demoniacs. Of some who have done this work it is seriously not too much to say that they are possessed of devils. They have worked miracles of sacrilege and murder. They have set wandering in the wilderness whole populations of cities so prosperous and countrysides so settled that the fiend's miracle would have been less if he had set forests and cornfields walking. No mountain tribe was ever torn up by the Turks and sent adrift to die as this storied and civilized State has been wantonly torn up by its near neighbours. The sufferings of such a race in such a ruin cannot be pictured in terms of any Christian hell : they can be traced in the infernal arabesques of Chinese and Tartar history. There is not a single pang in it that is not

too high a price to pay to the Prussians. There is not a pang that Belgium is not paying for our sake : and by her stripes we are healed.

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